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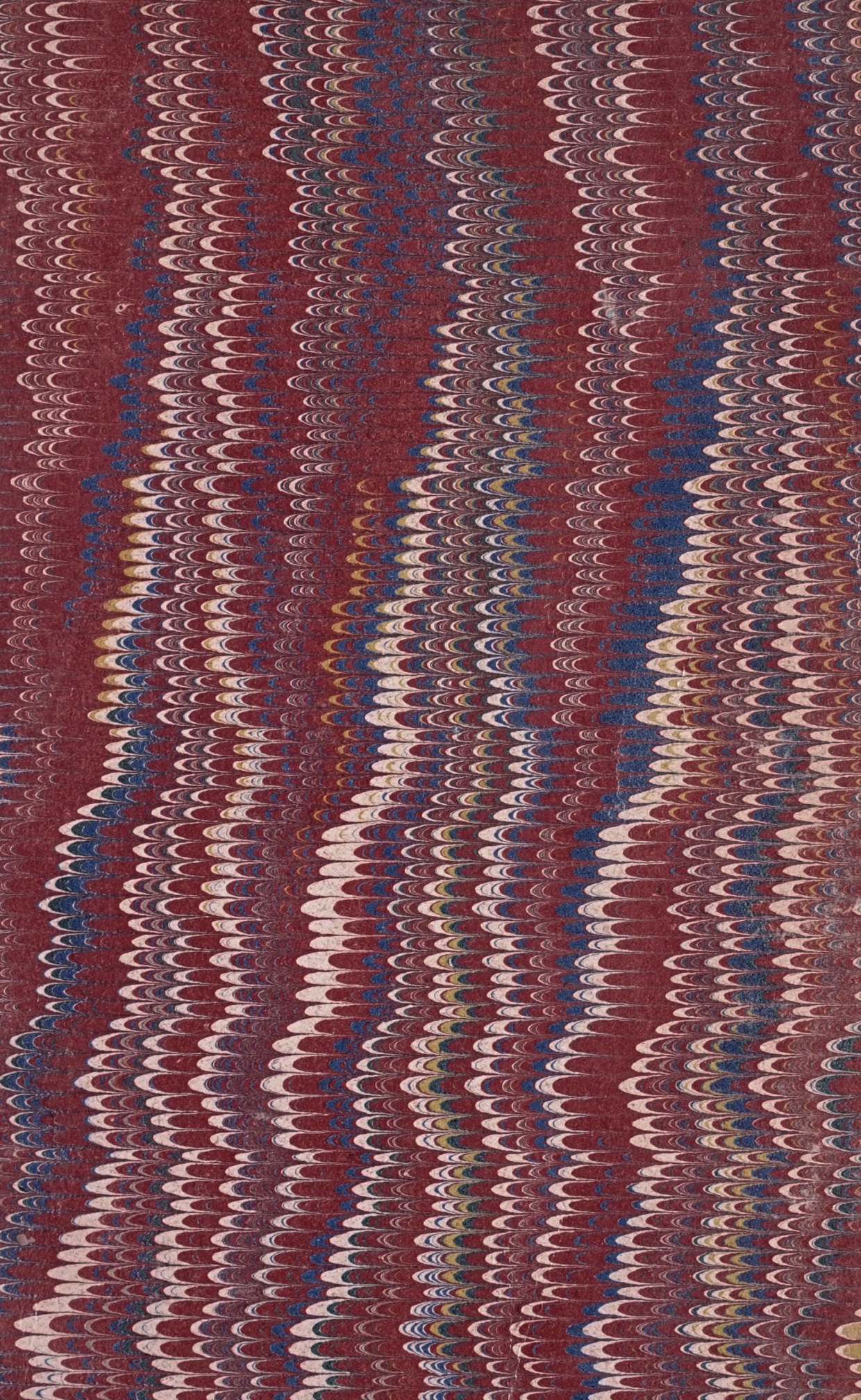
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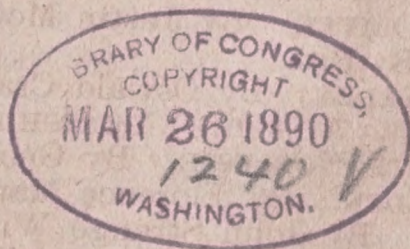
BY

TASMA,

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE PIPER OF PIPER'S HILL," ETC.

*Mrs. Jessie (Tracer) Couvreur.*

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NEW YORK  
FRANK F. LOVELL & COMPANY  
142 AND 144 WORTH STREET

1890



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CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST YOUTH

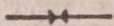
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# IN HER EARLIEST YOUTH.



## CHAPTER I.

### A LOSING GAME.

"For most men (till by losing rendered sager)  
Will back their own opinions by a wager."

—BYRON, *Beppo*, stanza 27.

THE Melbourne Cup day for 186— was of that peculiar sort popularly denoted by the term "one in a thousand;" a term, by-the-bye, which testifies to the general belief, inherent in mankind, that all good things are in a minority. Not even the long line of vehicles which crowded the road to Flemington had power to raise those overwhelming clouds of dust and grit—the bane of excursionists in Victoria. Early in the morning there had fallen soft, light showers of rain, and now the long level fields around the course were green and sparkling. The summer sun had not as yet burnt out their young freshness, or tarnished their tender hue. Hidden behind some fleece-like, opal-tinted clouds, he shone out now and then with an ardour which sent umbrellas up, and veils down; then retreating again, and like Moses, veiling himself considerably from the public gaze, he lent a sort of subdued radiance to the bright scene beneath. Strangers to the colony, of a meditative turn of mind, might well look with wondering eyes upon the crowded road, for from the family carriage, with its fat horses and well-appointed harness, its smug proprietors inside, and impenetrable coachman on the box, to the dustman's cart, with its freight of polished-up, yellow-soaped portion of humanity—all classes, all interests were represented.



"K-r-ect card o' the R-a-a-ces" was to be had at every turn of the road—from small, sharp-eyed, sharp-limbed boys—from vagabondism in the shape of coatless, ragged urchins—from "respectability down in the world," in the shape of men in shiny coats which had once been black, and black hats which had once been shiny.

And for once in the year, despite the undercurrent of feeling which must have run through the mind of every atom that went to make up the total of that mass of conscious existence—on this one occasion, may it be supposed, each mind was more like a reflection of its neighbour, than on any one of the remaining three hundred and sixty-four days in which there is no cup to be run for.

Angelina in the carriage, with her heart full of Edwin, had yet time to wonder whether she should win any gloves. Could she have looked into Edwin's heart, where she fondly believed she should discover nought but the image of her own sweet self, she might have been astonished to see that the image had dwindled down to very insignificant proportions; that figures rode rampant under Edwin's waistcoat, and that gloomy forebodings of horses scratched, and impossible hedging, with nosey advisers in the background, filled her Edwin's breast.

"Great and mean meet massed in death," says Shelley, and great and mean meet massed in expectation likewise on the morning of a Melbourne Cup day.

There is a story told—I think it is by Hans Andersen—of a fortunate Princess who possessed a musical box which tinkled forth its harmonies to the accompaniment of steam. This same steam arose from the pot wherein the dinner was cooking of any person about whom the Princess might happen to be curious, and she was thereby enabled to detect who was to eat fresh meat, and who was engaged in making a *rechauffé* of yesterday's meal for to-day. Our penetration shall be still more wondrous than the Princess's, and diving into the hearts instead of the saucepans of mankind, we shall discover what perplexing thoughts are puckering the forehead of the young man who is leaning back in a hansom on his way to the races, intent to all appearance upon his betting-book. There is a gathering dissatisfaction in his grey-blue, rather prominent eyes, as



he goes on with his calculations, and his weak, well-meaning, mobile mouth, partly hidden by a light, well-disposed moustache, looks pitifully disappointed, like that of a baffled child.

There are types of character in figure as in face. George Drafton's shoulders are essentially horsemanlike. He is light of build : the sporting man with a dash of the gentleman asserts itself in his tight-fitting trousers, and proclaims itself aloud in his cutaway coat. In point of fact he is well pleased that this should be the case, his knowledge of horse-flesh being far-reaching and profound. He can run through the pedigree of every racer of fame in the colonies, and can tell you, without a pause for reflection, what horses have won the principal races in Melbourne and Sydney for years back, the time to a second they occupied in the running, and perchance the name of the jockeys who rode them.

At Rubria, his uncle's station on the Murray, where he is manager-in-chief, overseer, and general head and authority, George studies intently the sporting columns of the *Australasian*, and follows laboriously the fluctuations of the betting market. He has a golden dream, and this dream is a double, and some day the double is to be realised. He loses heart sometimes—the dream is so tardy of realisation ; but he hugs to himself the recollection that it was all but verified once. He cannot apply the axiom that "A miss is as good as a mile," and that in matters of racing "Half a head is as good as a mile ;" but after every disappointment he clings the closer to his golden dream, and builds up a new combination to wile it into action. As he makes his way to the saddling paddock friends and acquaintances run into his path. "Give us a tip, Drafton, old fellow," says a stripling with an old-man face. "Lay me on to a good thing, will you, Drafton, my boy?" says another. These compliments to his discrimination never come amiss to George, and help to bring back his mind into the groove of passive self-complacency to run out of which has chafed him so sorely. Portly bankers give him a friendly nod, and grave men of business, in whose white waistcoats is seen a sort of concession to the relaxed nature of the day, hold out a cordial hand as he pushes past them. Men with noses of undue prominence, and aggressive watch-chains to which depend



*breloques* flashing with glittering stones, salute him as one with whom they have had satisfactory dealings. There is a hail-fellow-well-met air about him which is not unpleasing, and there is a certainty about his uncle which widens the smiles with which George is regarded. The certainty takes shape in thousands of acres in Victoria, in millions of acres in Queensland, in great warehouses and offices in Flinders Lane, in the aroma which emanates from a "man of means." George likes to use his uncle's name as a reference on occasions. "Josiah Carp, of Messrs. Cavil & Carp—that's my uncle. Some of the richest landowners in Victoria! By the Lord Harry, I only wish I had a tenth part of what he fools away in his blessed improvements every year." And thereupon George gives his saddler an order for a racing saddle, which is to make "the cockatoos" \* open their eyes, on the strength of his uncle, "Mr. Josiah Carp, of Messrs. Cavil & Carp, Flinders Lane East."

To-day he has almost forgotten that he is his uncle's nephew. He has no eyes for spring's velvet-pile carpet upon which he is treading; hardly a glance to spare for the parti-coloured hues which surround him; the human kaleidoscope scattered before his sight conveys nothing to his mind; his whole soul is absorbed in contemplation of a board, which is elevated with a jerk near the judge's stand, like a stiff arm suddenly thrown out and petrified. The board is black, and on it stand a row of white figures, *thus*—2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11. George's eyebrows almost disappear into his hat as he regards it, and the three light seams which run horizontally across his forehead become for the second deep furrows with ridges between them. "Rosana scratched! By George!" he exclaims, "it's like my confounded luck! Another chance gone! Damn the whole affair! I give it up!"

So the golden dream was not to turn to a golden reality just yet. Next day George was forced to return to the bush, poorer by some hundreds than when he came to town. As he journeyed up in the train, sole occupant of a carriage, feet extended on the opposite seat, aching head stuffed into the double-cushioned corner, he fell into a whole train of reflections, after this wise. First he cursed

\* Cockatoo is the name usually given to a petty farmer in Victoria.



his luck, and then himself, hoped his uncle would not get wind of the affair, and fell to cogitating on the chances of "the New Year's meeting;" then remembered that he had hoped to get across to Sydney after the shearing was over, and bethought him of the object of his visit there. This gave a new turn to his inward musings, for Sydney was the home of the vision, not the golden, but the soft-eyed, smiling vision, which was wont to hover about his bedside before he closed his eyes at night, and appear radiant and laughing in his dreams. "I don't deserve her," he thought; "she doesn't know what evil means! Still, I think if I had her to keep me straight, I should be a good enough fellow, as the world goes. Confound it all! I don't drink, I never did a mean thing in my life! I would give up that cursed gambling, and I would try—upon my soul, I would try—to make her happy. If I didn't succeed, and I couldn't reform properly, well, I would go to the devil as fast as could be, and so rid her of me very soon. But there'd be no jolly fear of my going to the devil if Pauline would have me! But will she have me? That old stick of a grandmother wouldn't let me ask her last time, and that's more than a year ago now. Well, I shall know soon anyhow, and if she says 'No!' I shall take it as a sign that I'm not to bother my head about reforming or marriage, or anything of that sort, at any rate; and if she says 'Yes'!"——

What would have happened if the Pauline of George's meditations had said "Yes!" must go to swell the shadowy ranks of all the abortive conjectures and resolutions of whose germs we have ever been conscious, for the train shot into a station, the guard called out—"Ten minutes for refreshments!" and George scanned the platform to discern whether he should find any roving acquaintances "on for a little game." "In for a penny, in for a pound!" he said. "I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb!"



## CHAPTER II.

### GEORGE DRAFTON'S BOYHOOD.

"Oh me! my uncle's spirit is in these stones."

—SHAKSPERE, *King John*.

GEORGE'S uncle (uncle by marriage only) was a *nouveau riche*. He had "taken to wife, to cheer his life," as the quaint old rhyme has it, a sister of George's mother, and she dying soon after their marriage, left him wifeless and childless. It is not recorded whether he grieved for her much. She had, it is true, a granite tombstone, and a costly funeral, by means of which the poor corpse was mocked with all that pompous pageantry by which we are supposed to honour the empty shell of some spirit that has held communion with our own for a few easily forgotten years.

"Poor Mrs. Carp," people said; "she was very reserved! Quite a young woman too! Dear me! what a pity! I wonder who will be the second Mrs. Carp!"

This was the elegy chanted over her by the friends whom she had been wont to set at her table. But it is well so!

Shall we go sorrowing because our neighbour mourns? Were we to grieve and be heartstricken for others' woes, we might pour ashes over our heads and array ourselves in sackcloth to the end of our days.

So Josiah Carp mourned with decency during an allotted time, and took no thought of marrying again. Conventionality was his gospel; business was the god he adored. He was a strange compound of good and evil, of ignorance and intelligence, of overweening egotism on the one hand and industrial energy on the other. A great station-owner, whose managers were wont to quake at his approach; a general merchant, whose name was familiar among the princes of commerce at home; president of this board, chairman of that; railway director, bank director, insurance



office director ; autocrat in his own calling, possessing the largest bump of self-esteem on the largest, shiniest cranium that ever came under a phrenologist's digits. His very shoulders—he was a short, powerfully built man—were obtrusive in their prosperous complacency.

I wonder, in these wondering days of speculative theory, when there are codes of philosophy both astronomic and gastronomic, when character has been discovered to lurk behind the ear and to frown upon you from the brows, to ooze out at your fingers' ends and to twine around your toes—I wonder, I say, that no one has been found to point out its resting-place on the shoulders, or to mark the expression which lies from the nape of the neck downwards. To classify backs would be a wearisome task : their variety is great, their distinction marvellous. How often do we recognise a friend from behind by the cut of his shoulders, upon which his individuality is almost as clearly stamped as upon his face. There is the clerical cut, and the horsey cut, and the studious cut, and the devil-may-care cut, as there are sulky backs, and successful backs, and suppressed backs, and imperturbable backs. And whereas a man may school himself to compose his countenance, and so prevent his predominant characteristic from appearing therein, but cannot prevent his shoulders from following their bent, so will they gradually assume a nameless somewhat breathing of their owner and their owner's tendency, and after a subtle but certain fashion of their own distinguish him from his fellow-men.

Mr. Carp's self-asserting shoulders and bumptious back had often roused George's ire as a boy. He would walk by his uncle's side and listen to the maxims which the elder man instilled into him—maxims which Josiah would illustrate in all good faith by dwelling upon his own particular perfections. Youth was to bow down before him and strive humbly to follow in his footsteps. The boy disliked his guardian, and dreaded these walks in his company. He quailed under the cold stare of the eyes, which, medusa-like, transfixed him where he stood—steely eyes which had a knack of fastening themselves upon you unawares, and shooting out a dart of inquiry that probed the very depths of your soul—suspicious eyes which made you think, with a sudden qualm, “What does he know about me?” and made inno-



cence flush, like guilt entrapped ; but shifting eyes too, if met by a bold front—eyes which would furtively peer round corners, or behind the cracks of a door, or under the folds of an envelope—whether under the rim of a bonnet likewise George in nowise troubled himself to inquire.

His aunt being dead, and he an orphan, he had been left as a sort of live-stock legacy to his uncle, who likewise held in trust for him his little fortune of four or five thousand pounds. His palmy days were spent at school ; his days of penance in Mr. Carp's house at Toorrah. He loathed the handsome villa, where he dared not run across the hall, lest his boots should scratch the marble tiles ; where he must not enter the drawing-room all day, lest he should carry dust upon the rich carpet ; where he durst only look at the heavy, leather-bound, gilt, bedecked volumes, that stood with crisp, new, unsoiled pages on the shelves of his uncle's library. In vain Roderick Random leered invitingly down, or Gil Blas would have allured him to follow in his roguish sport among robbers' dens or barber-doctor's adventures ! He must still look wistfully at the glass doors which shut in these treasures, and look and long, "and nothing more."

These dreary epochs in a young life were not frequent, however. A popular fellow at school, he was never without invitations all through his holidays, and not unwillingly fought shy of the villa, where the very garden, with its every branch cut and trimmed, and the long, cold drawing-room, with its dreary knick-knacks and works of art precisely laid out on inlaid tables and buhl cabinets, repressed and chilled him.

The name of father had no association for George. He was wont, as a very little child, to say "papa" to every man in uniform, because he was taught to regard an indifferent painting of a hectic veteran, between whose cheeks and military coat the artist had impartially divided his red ochre, as "my own papa." Before he could speak quite plainly "my own papa" was the postman on a cold morning ; the paternity was then transferred to a fish-dealer, whose scarlet blouse and carmine nose were to George's infant mind a clear proof of identity. Finally the picture had the best of it, and the little boy was fain to believe that he owed, like a virtuous Chinaman, all possible



reverence and respect to the chronic victim of scarlet fever who shone over his bedroom mantelpiece.

With his mother the case was different. A closely held recollection of a dear face, always beaming and bright for him, however it might look upon the rest of the world—of a voice attuned by love and mother's pride when it addressed itself to him—of a soft hand which stroked down his rough head and tucked him into his bed at night—rose clearly before him when Mr. Carp's hard voice grated on his ear, and the metallic eyes were bent severely on him, and filled him with vain longing and yearning inconceivable.

When he was about eighteen his uncle for the first time broached the subject of his future career.

"You've 'ad schooling enough, George," he said—Mr. Carp, it may be observed *par parenthèse*, having dropped his *h*'s broadcast in his youth, had never been able to pick them up since—"if you can't turn it to account now, that's your own fault. I've got a berth open for you in my office; be up at seven, begin work at nine, 'ome at six, and you'll find you've plenty of time for reading up and improving yourself at night."

This was all the prospect held out to a young man at the outset of life, full of youthful impulses, and not destitute of manly aims. He tried it for a space, and sickened of it. "What's the good of it all," he thought, "if I hate it and it leads to no result?"

His philosophy was not of the deeply inquiring sort, which would make him embark in the futile attempt to solve the great question of life—a question which never has and never will be answered, though men grovel in the dust, and wear heart and brain to madness in weary striving at its solution. He was here—that was enough for him—and he must make the best of it; and the "best" did not mean the spending of his days in working for a disparaging master, and his evenings in listening to disquisitions upon rectitude, which he saw flatly contradicted in practice on the morrow; or the reverberations of long-drawn snores when the holder-forth of these sage doctrines had succumbed to the triple influences of dinner and port wine and the *Journal of Commerce* combined.

George had an essentially impressionable nature. A



kind word, a nod of approval, would have spurred him on like a willing horse; but these were never forthcoming; and he might have said, "Oh me! my uncle's spirit is in this ledger," so heart-sick did he become of his unprofitable additions.

Occasionally Mr. Carp went to the club, or spent his evening at the "'Ouse." On these occasions George would sit brooding at home, afraid to go, like other young men of his age, to the theatre. When he did so, an uneasy consciousness of his uncle's presence gleaming through those cold eyes overcame and oppressed him, and he crept home like a thief to get into the house through his bedroom window, which he had made interest with the housemaid to leave open for him, and to confront his guardian at the breakfast table with a countenance on which a sort of defiant uneasiness was plainly expressed. He made up his mind at last that he could endure such a mode of life no longer. He had no seaward impulses, like many lads who man our navy and our merchantmen, but I think he would have preferred to be a cabin-boy, sworn at by a bluff captain, and engrossed all day in washing greasy plates in greasier water, than to be condemned to a perpetual feast at which so life-chilling a skeleton must preside. Not that I would herein imply that Mr. Carp bore the faintest resemblance to an actual and not a typical skeleton. He was fashioned in the mould of the publisher described in that quaint book which tells of "Dr. Syntax in Search of the Picturesque"—

"He was a man whose ample paunch  
Was lined with beef and ham and haunch."

The skeleton formation lay concealed under flesh and muscle and encircling rolls of fat. The skull was hidden under broad cheeks, clean shaved but for some grizzled whiskers on either side. The chin was firm and square, the lips grimly pleasant and oftentimes sour smiling, the neck as the neck of a bull. George watched him one evening, when, after dinner, leaning back in his chair, his short obese figure looked like a gigantic caterpillar in a plethoric stage, propped up against a support; the *Mark Lane Express* in his hand, his unfinished glass of wine on the table at his elbow. The extremity of his case gave the boy courage to blurt out some of the thoughts which were



seething in his mind. It is true that he made three abortive attempts to shape his thoughts into words ; that getting the first time as far as "Unk"—a sudden closing of his throat brought the "kel" to a disastrous end ; that bringing up the next "Uncle" in husky haste, it died upon his lips as he uttered it ; and that he converted the last spasmodic venture into a kind of strangled sneeze, which caused Josiah Carp to open his steely eyes with a jump, just as the letters of the *Mark Lane Express* were beginning to blur and blot each other before his drowsy gaze. But George now plunged into his subject recklessly.

"I don't think somehow, uncle"—this not very coherently—"I mean—I think, in fact you know,—I'm not cut out for an office life."

The gleaming orbs detached themselves from the columns of the *Mark Lane Express*, and rested with a stare of cold disapproval on the boy's flushed face.

"You must improve in your 'andwriting," replied the great man shortly ; "get up an hour earlier of a morning and practise your copies. When *I* was your age I turned out of bed in the dark, and set to my writing as soon as it got a bit light."

Now as Mr. Carp's caligraphy belonged to a paralytic and otherwise disabled family of strokes, which in impotent haste tripped each other up, and tumbled over their neighbour's heels, and doubled each other up in all the contortions of the cramp and the colic, the parallel was, to say the least of it, hardly reassuring, nor perhaps entirely suited to the case in point. George therefore braced himself up for a fresh plunge.

"I don't mean that exactly, uncle, but I mean—I mean——"

"What do you mean then, in God's name?" asked the other irritably. "Speak out, can't you !"

"Well, you see"—this very resolutely—"I want to try a station life. I wouldn't much care what I commenced at. Travelling with cattle, or shepherding, or boundary riding even, or anything, so long as——"

At this crisis a sort of gulp interrupted the flow of his eloquence, but the rest of the sentence might have been construed into "so long as I'm out of *your* way."

His uncle laid down the paper. There were some conflicting emotions at work under that broad expanse of



waistcoat, troubling, I cannot say his heart, but his brain, his stomach, his digestion generally. His nephew would have six thousand pounds of his own when he came of age, and could make himself independent of his guardian. Moreover, of all Josiah's queer characteristics, none was more remarkable than his principle of adhesiveness. He disliked parting with any one who in the capacity of manager, overseer, clerk, office-boy, or bottle-washer had been in the employ of the great firm of "Cavil & Carp." There were mixed motives at work here, neither wholly good nor wholly evil. In the first instance, those he employed were obliged to bring him unimpeachable characters with them. In the next, he could not endure that the daily routine of his business should be discussed or descanted upon. He had been known to goad and bully a faithful servant until the man, exasperated beyond endurance, declared that he must leave him then and there, and would fain have flung his wages into his taskmaster's face. Thereupon Josiah had been known to cringe to his erstwhile victim, and to promise him much increase of salary on condition of his remaining; but such a result was too uncertain to be reckoned upon, and more frequently his employes would pocket his abuse and his money with outward calm and inward wrath. He had achieved a reputation for his firm which made it appear to anxious aspirants as tempting as a bank—that Land of Promise which young men so often enter for life lured on by the hazy and golden prospect of possible inspectorships and general managerships.

Rapidly turning over George's case in his mind, Mr. Carp decided that his nephew should have his own way. Possibly under the impenetrable coating of egotism and business worship which encrusted his soul there lurked a faint feeling of kindness for the lad. Moreover, he thought much of the world's opinion, and the world, if it came to be convinced that he had used an orphan nephew with unnecessary harshness, thwarting his wishes and natural bent without reason or motive, might look less admiringly upon him, and hear with less credulity those admirable maxims of which he believed himself to be the living illustration. So far it could not be said of him that he had neglected his duty with regard to George in the matter of his food, and his clothing, and his education.



That he had seldom or ever bestowed on him a genial or encouraging word, that he had repressed and chilled all his boyish desires and youthful longings, that he had isolated him from his companions and friends, and had established over him a sort of unwholesome influence, by means of which he made himself dreaded and disliked, yet feared and obeyed, were matters not for the world's ken; but the controlling of his inclinations with regard to his future career *was* a matter for the world's ken, and revolving all these considerations in his mind, Mr. Carp settled with himself that George might take to station life when he liked.

So he said briefly—"If you want to learn squatting, I can send you to one of my stations. It's not such a paying game as a town business, and I think you're a fool for your pains; but a wilful beast must 'ave 'is own way!"

This was one of the small aphorisms he delighted in, and which he was wont to scatter broadcast in his discourse and his letters; flinging them out recklessly—wide of the mark sometimes, hitting it at others, but always garnishing his ideas with them.

George hardly dared to believe that he had gained his point so easily. He tried to thank his uncle in a voice from which he essayed to banish that tremulous quaver which our utterances assume when our desires are suddenly realised, and he lowered his eyelids lest the joy that danced in his eyes should "stir the bile" (as Molière would say) of the elder man. What new-born delight thrilled him! He was like one of Dante's long-vexed souls, escaping from the tormenting nightmare of the "Purgatories," and inhaling the first breath of the balmy air wafted from the regions of Eternal Peace. What bright visions in one short moment filled his brain! Visions of all the glories and freedom of a squatter's life; of broad far-reaching plains in which he was already galloping in imagination after bounding kangaroo; of long stockwhips, whose crack like the report of a pistol already sounded in his ear; of nightly camp-fires round which jolly yarns or bush songs travel so quickly; of life, in fact, or what to him meant life and happiness. He scarcely slept that night, and pondered much as to whether he should go to the office in the morning. His heart sank when his uncle scowled at him as he took his seat at the breakfast table next morning, and said—



"You'll be late for work, George, if you don't make 'aste over your breakfast."

But he plodded doggedly on that day, and the next, and the next, until the heart-sickness of deferred hope laid hold of him. Then Mr. Carp told him suddenly to be ready for a start next evening by one of Cobb's coaches, as he meant to place him under one of his managers on the Murray. All this happened about eight years prior to the time when George is on his way to the races in a hansom, and in the sketch of his after life it will be seen how these early influences affected his future bearing.

There is a much-worn simile extant which compares the reaction of an overstrained mind to the breaking of a bow whose tension has been too great; but if the bow be of a tough material, the harder the strain the greater should be its resistance, until it had relaxed the undue pressure and gained the day. George's mind was like a very elastic bow giving way to the force of the last new hand which bends it. It yielded to every fresh influence which was brought to bear upon it. His uncle had aimed at crushing out his self-dependence. Now that it was in part restored to him he hardly knew what use to make of it. Nevertheless he soon became a favourite on the station. His pluck, good humour, and openness of disposition won him friends. Resolved upon proving that he was the exact opposite of his uncle, he was "Hail fellow, well met" with every man on the place; would sit on the kitchen table at night and take his turn at a song, or at the narration of a not over-choice story with the rest; always, be it remarked, quite content to sink to the level of his companions, without any thought of raising them to his own. His temper was easily roused, but easily appeased—a temper that would find vent in swearing some round oaths and "showing fight"—to laugh at its own ebullition five minutes later. When his little fortune was left at his own disposal he shook off to a great extent his uncle's thralldom, but he never quite overcame a sensation of vague discomfort in his presence. Mr. Carp found him more serviceable than he had expected, and had transferred him from one post to another until he had installed him in that managership of which mention is made in the first chapter.



There is a particular period in young men's lives in which they are popularly said to be "sowing their wild oats." Considering the sorry crop they produce, the energy with which this branch of industrial agriculture is carried on savours somewhat of the marvellous. Many who have never "done a hand's turn" in any other line may be seen prosecuting this labour with such perseverance and such ardour that they wear out their very lives in the service, and before the harvest is ripe fall victims to their own devotion to their work.

George Drafton was not one of these, but the ground was tilled, and he was dropping in the seed—hesitatingly and sparingly at first, more recklessly and in hot haste as the task went on. He smeared his hands but slightly with the black husks of debauch which bear so putrid a fruit; he scattered abroad handfuls of the puffy grains of gambling, which indeed are so unproductive that save for the fortunate few, who possess a golden garner whereby to replenish their pockets, they produce no fruit at all, while the sterile soil still calls for more, and patches of rich earth bear delusive promise of yielding up the seed an hundredfold. It may be wondered where George found opportunities for sowing his particular crop. Our forefathers would have suggested a ready devil, who, as fast as the cumbersome paving-stones of good intentions were laboriously laid down in the direction of his sulphurous abode, supplanted them with smiling opportunities.

When Shakspeare says, "O opportunity, thy guilt is great!" he echoes, as indeed in almost every page he echoes, a truth that hardly one of us has not found some occasion to rue.

George found frequent reasons for coming to town. He cultivated billiards with great zeal and success at the nearest township. Of his sporting propensities mention has already been made.

Having brought him up therefore to this point in his life, and only lightly touched upon the one unsullied image besides his mother's which he cherished, bringing it out of the innermost recesses of his heart in his better moments to encourage his worthier aspirations and aid his higher thoughts, we will leave his actions hereafter to speak for themselves, and to prove whether he was made of genuine gold or only of base metal after all.



### CHAPTER III.

#### PAULINE'S DIARY.

"Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare."—BYRON.

Two catastrophes to record! Uncle Chubby is in jail (grandma's linen-press), for saying "Hang it," and I am not to go to the Crokers' party! In the teeth of two such afflictions, I don't know where to go for solace. Philosophy won't help me a bit, for it is utterly futile to say "I don't care," when I do, and care too so much. Philosophy is all very well when one has an audience for it, but it goes a very little way when one has to preach it, and practise it too, all by one's self. I know that at this minute Chubby is saying, "Hang it," "Hang it," over and over again until he is tired, and although I am not incarcerated in that fusty linen-press of grannie's, redolent of lavender and camphor, I feel as if I could say "Hang it!" too.

Shall I turn my eyes seaward, "as people say in books," for comfort? Will it bring a mysterious peace to my thwarted spirit to see that stretch of bay which lies at the foot of our garden turn from dark blue to warm slate-colour in the sunset, or to see (as the people who dabble in colour say) that bit of ginger-coloured sky melt into faint green, as its edges get mixed with the surrounding blue! Do I find the very smallest spark of consolation in the unmistakable whiffs of briny air which reach my nostrils, mingled with delicious citrony and lemony odours from the shrubbery beyond the lawn?

Chubby's morepork issues forth from his anchorite's cell under the laurestinus, and opens that cavernous, shark-like maw of his to "give vent to the ghost of a caw." This is an utterly misapplied quotation, but let it pass! Well, do the morepork's solemn eyes enliven my musings? Not a bit of it! I would rather see a full-length reflection of



myself to-night in my new ball-dress, than look at Sydney Harbour painted by a colonial Turner in colours which run riot over the canvas. I would rather be putting a judicious "quontam" of Jockey Club behind my ears, and dabbing my arms with violet powder, than inhale all this perfume laden breeze, "faint with too much sweet," as Shelley says. That is a bad habit of mine, that appropriation of other people's best thoughts! But when the very thing you want to express has been said exactly as it ought to be said by some master mind, it seems pitiable to put the thought into your own poor words instead of writing it down with two little flourishes at either end to prevent your getting the credit of it yourself.

But to come back to my grievance. There sits grandma! I can see her through the window of the verandah where I am sitting. It's not quite light enough to say for certain, but I can answer for it as surely as if I were looking at her as steadfastly as the morepork is looking at me, that she has her "I will and I shall" expression on to-night. I wonder if I were to rush into the room all *explorée*, and fall upon my knees on that lob-sided hassock near the fender, and say, "Chère et bien aimée petite grand mère" (it is always best to coax her in her own language) "de grace aie pitié de ton enfant gâtée! rends la heureuse cette seule fois!" and then to get up a little sniff behind my handkerchief, whether it would have any effect. I think not. I fancy I can see grandma assuming that puzzled air of chilling politeness which is so utterly disconcerting to a rampant petitioner. She would reply in the most scrupulously chosen English—"Of that which I have said, I do not return;" and I should have made a fool of myself for nothing.

Oh, hang it! I say again. It is a relief to write down the mutinous words! I should like to go to the linen-press and sing them in chorus with Uncle Chubby! I am writing at random, for it is getting so dark that the garden looks like a beautiful uncoloured photograph with grey shrubs standing out softly against the clear white sky. Fifine is bringing in the lamp. Yes; I was right! No prostration of oneself, no self-abasement, would be availing to-night. I have been pondering over a plan of eating nothing at tea-time; not of sulking (that is derogatory), but of looking like a cheerful martyr, sweetly submissive, of



course, but still too broken-spirited to heed such bodily requirements as coffee and cream, and thin bread and butter.

Alas for our carnal natures! I smell a galette! Yes, Fifine is bringing it in, her cheeks hot from the combined influences of her own triumph and the kitchen oven. On second thoughts I won't go upon the martyr system this time. For one thing I'm sure it wouldn't answer, and for another we mightn't have a galette to-morrow. . . .

*Half an hour after tea!* Oh, long evening, when will you be over! The short oblivion of my troubles induced by the galette is at an end, and now I have nothing to look forward to but the recreative pastime of hearing Chubby go through his Ollendorff for to-morrow. I shall ask him whether he has the "hat his cousin's wife has," which is a physical impossibility to begin with, and he will reiterate in that chanting monotone of his that "he has not got his cousin's wife's hat, but that he has the vest of his brother's tailor." And all the time I shall be thinking of the Crokers' smooth floor, and the "beautiful Danube" will run through my head, and crowning tribulation of all—I shall see Jamesina Croker—Great Heavens! what a name!—swaying and slipping round the room with Sir Francis Segrave. I could endure it better if Jamesina were not so pretty. I wish I could console myself by disparaging her, but the disparagement and the philosophy are both equally futile, when I can see with my two clear-seeing eyes how awfully pretty Jamesina really is. I know her skin to be red and white in the right places, her nose most odiously straight, and her mouth a sort of aggravation of perfection after the style of the Venus Victrix mouth. Then her absurd little confiding manner is irresistible. I feel inclined to pet and protect her myself, though I know she has just been making "a square meal," and can pommel her little brothers like the "Old Woman who lived in a Shoe."

Thank goodness, grandma is dinning Chubby's Ollendorff into his obtuse little pate. She will call me to read to her directly. I don't think she's in a Madame de Campan mood to-night. Most likely we shall go through a course of the *Philosophie Positive*, or discuss some of St. Simon's cogent conclusions, for grandma wants me to be an *esprit fort*, although I don't think she minds



my being *un tant soit peu coquette* into the bargain. It reminds her of my poor mother, I suppose, who, if Fifine is to be relied upon, must have worried my father's life out. I like to look at mother's miniature, and I like to be told I'm the living image of her—not that I entirely believe it, for I can't help thinking that some tawny ancestor of the Delaunay family must have vented his spite upon me especially, and touched up my hair and eyes (which would be otherwise so delightfully dark) with these unaccountable shades of rust-colour. Warm tints! I may as well call them, but I wish they had not been so partial to my hair. My cheeks have been left quite in the cold! It requires a superhuman excitement to brighten them up with the least bit of that flush which has settled permanently in Jamesina's face. In fact, my complexion is all over what grandma calls "*mat.*" This pleasing distraction of scribbling about myself does not carry my thoughts away properly from the party. Perhaps at this very second Sir Francis is talking to Jamesina in that "specially-interested-in-the-person-you-are-talking-to sort of voice; and if he says, "Will you give me this waltz, Miss Croker?" Jamesina will jump at it, I know, in her own heart. I wonder why we are both so interested in him? He has *enormément de la distinction*, as Grannie says. That must be the secret of it. There is a something belonging to Englishmen, an intonation, an expression, a something indescribable, undefinable, which goes farther than good looks, or cleverness, or even good morals. Very few colonials have it. I wonder whether men recognise this in each other as quickly as we do in them. Oh dear! Chubby is relegated to the side-table with the everlasting Ollendorff at his elbow, and grandma has capsized "Fourier," and is opening Comte with an air which means business. Is it so great an advantage to belong to the Encyclopédiste school? In a few minutes a whirl of confused and bewildering thoughts will assail my mind. So far the whole system of the universe seems embodied to me in the few words, "Might is right;" but then might means law, and law means . . . Yes, grandma, I am coming *à l'instant même!*

The ties which bound Pauline's belongings together



were of a complicated description. Her grandmother abided by the French principle of being no older than she appeared; her appearance, however, varying with the different phases through which she passed in the course of a day, she subverted nature's plans by growing steadily younger until the hour of bedtime had arrived. In the night Time did double work, but Madame's theory allowed her to outwit Time in the daylight; on the other hand, she yielded herself up to him in the obscurity. Her only child, Ernest, otherwise Chubby, so called from his pendant cheeks in the days of his fat infancy, was now in his eighth year; her only grandchild, Pauline, in her eighteenth. It was perplexing and embarrassing, but this is how it came about.

This stately French woman had left her convent-school, her indifferent image of the Virgin that simpered at her from its pedestal on the oratory, her plaster cherub ingeniously perched in the alcove over her white couch, holding in his smiling mouth the shell of holy water wherewith she was wont to besprinkle herself in the morning, her peaceful routine of devotions and penances, all these she had left at the age of sixteen to swear, at her parents' bidding, to "cleave until death should her part," to Monsieur Henri Delaunay, deputy, man of letters, and Liberal. Her family belonged to the conservative type of souls which cannot understand that the "old order should change." To them no ghastly, blood-besmeared guillotine taught a horrible lesson. An era of martyrdom had set in, and heaven was to be peopled by sainted aristocrats and monarchs, whose divine rights would be recognised by the angels. It was with some misgiving that they contemplated the idea of seeing a daughter of their house become Madame Delaunay, but many considerations biassed their decision.

Delaunay, in those days when a Bourbon king was peaceably seated on the throne, was reticent in the expression of his true opinions. He married to serve his own political ends, and to strengthen his interests with the Legitimist class; and because Honorine had hardly any dowry, her parents listened to his propositions and sent for their little girl from school, in order that she might be presented to the man whose property she was to become during the



ensuing month. Delaunay had resolved that the child who was to be made over to him should pursue unharassed by marital interference her own little scheme of life. He was profoundly sceptical of the average woman's mental capacity or moral strength, but believed, like most of his nation, that the superstitious element in her character should be fostered, as exercising a restraining power against the wants of her emotional nature, which might otherwise find an outlet in love-making. Hence he was willing that Honorine should be on the best of terms with her confessor, and was prepared to approve of her continuing in his house the religious exercises which had alternated with the meals and needlework during her life at the convent. But the deputy speedily discovered that his child-wife was not of the order of which confiding *dévotés* are made. Her bright black eyes shone with keenly awakened interest when she first heard his voice in the Assembly. In a different way, but with a charming assumption of wifely responsibility, the little *pensionnaire* held forth to the man of letters as soon as she found herself alone with him, recalling the heads of his discourse, requesting the elucidation of uncomprehended sentences, daring even to question some of his opinions, and explaining the reason of her questioning them. Staggered and charmed, her husband took her upon his knees, and thenceforth she became his friend and pupil. Her quick and retentive brain grasped the most complicated subjects. She substituted Montesquieu and Voltaire for Bossuet and Fénelon, and before the birth of her little girl studied "Emile" with ardour. Delaunay's was hardly a successful career, but he was always the first of men in his wife's eyes. Under the Second Empire he obtained an appointment in French Guiana, willingly expatriating himself from a country where the prevailing system of government irritated and goaded him, but to disturb which he felt would be worse than useless. From French Guiana he was transferred to Sydney, and in Sydney, many years later, he died. Their first child, Pauline's mother, asserted the effect of her having imbibed Rousseau at the fountain-head, by proving herself essentially a child of nature, and threatening to enact the rôle of "La Nouvelle Héloïse" if she were



not allowed to marry a curly-headed midshipman of nineteen. The boy and girl were therefore mated, and in three months' time they quarrelled perpetually, and ran to Père and Mère Delaunay to complain of each other. "We will take her home again," they said at last, wearied out by these constantly recurring scenes. A grimmer arbiter, however, stepped in unexpectedly, and settled the connubial disputes for ever. A small tombstone in a closed-up cemetery in Sydney records that it is sacred to the memory of Rosalie, beloved wife of Guthrie Vyner; and it further adds, in neatly tabulated sentences, that she died in childbirth, at eighteen. Neither Montesquieu nor Rousseau availed when her mother beheld the statuesque corpse of her wilful darling lifted into the loathsome coffin.

Guthrie cried and sobbed like a penitent boy, and sailed away to England, where he had yet to go through his higher examinations before he could aspire to a lieutenancy. There remained behind a solemn baby, with wistful brown eyes and a pale face. They called her Pauline, as a tribute to Henri Delaunay's recollection of his mother, and loved her with an intensity not dictated by the principles of sound philosophy. Ten years later occurred an unexpected contingency. A second child was born to Madame Delaunay. This time she did not read Rousseau, but kept the little Pauline constantly by her side, and recounted to her in broken English the traits which had distinguished her mother as a child. When Chubby's wrinkled little visage was first brought to his niece to be kissed, the child considered him critically. "Will it always be so red?" she asked at last, and on being assured that, from a miniature Chocktaw Indian, it would develop into a sort of animated wax doll, she was apparently much relieved.

Her uncle Chubby began his career as her plaything—it is said that she held him head downwards as an experiment in the minority of his babyhood. His first steps and first words were to her matters of the profoundest interest. From plaything he became playmate and companion. She did not think it possible that she could ever love any human being as she loved Chubby. Her father



meant simply a vapid young man, who some years ago had paid a flying visit to the Colonies, and had come to the North Shore to see his little girl. She had been very shy, and he had been in the predicament of increasing her shyness.

Pauline was not sorry when papa said good-bye. He was at Malta now, whither, every three months, she despatched four pages filled with her square handwriting, at a great cost of labour to herself, and a sense of immunity from trouble for another quarter of a year. Her grandfather's death happened while Chubby was still a baby, and Pauline dated from it the hard expression that came at times into Madame Delaunay's eyes. She remembered seeing her grandmother beating her hands on the coverlet which concealed her husband's body in an abandonment of despair. Madame Delaunay could speak of Rosalie, and habitually cried when she spoke of her. Of her husband she never spoke, and when Pauline was inquisitive in the matter of family chronicles, Fifine would tell Mademoiselle of her *bon papa*, and assure her that it was a *ménage comme il n'y en a pas* when he was alive. Whereupon Mademoiselle would be seized with a spontaneous sentiment of pity for her grandmother, as she pictured Chubby in Monsieur Delaunay's place and herself in Madame's. She tried hard on this particular night to soften her mental attitude towards her grandmother by recalling all that Fifine had told her, but Madame Delaunay's rejuvenescent period of the day had set in, and the jets of gas overhead threw their light on two smooth fronts of black hair, artistically fastened to a flattering edifice of the haziest crape, and a face which seemed to reject sympathy. The same light flickered over the bronze coronal which surmounted Pauline's head and brought out strange metallic gleams of dark red gold. The little white frill clinging caressingly round her small round throat encircled a neck soft and white like a child's. There was mute resistance in Pauline's entire attitude. Her eyes, in which, when she was excited, you saw some wandering sparks of the colour which crept round the twisted coils of her dark hair, were moodily fixed on the book before her. Her red rebellious lips moved unwillingly. The crimson background of the *prie*



*Dieu* threw into relief her colourless face, suggesting a study by Van Dyck. There was promise of much future majesty in the line which swept from her ear downwards, recalling to any one who had closely studied it a certain side-view of the "Venus de Milo," as she stands on her pedestal in the Louvre, Queen regnante by right of the dignity which no mutilation can take from her. But Pauline's profile, distinguished by an infantine nose with an upward turn in it, in nowise resembled that of a Greek goddess, but possessed rather a certain defiant originality of its own, asserting its beauty in the face of all the rules of art which have ever mapped out the exact proportions of the nose and chin by rule of thumb.

"*Tenez,*" said Madame Delaunay, passing her a needle to thread, after five minutes' fruitless probing at an eye which was apparently always to the right or the left of the needle itself. Pauline turned the *Philosophie Positive* on its face, and lifted two abstracted brown eyes to the task.

The needle was submissive in her deft fingers, and she was on the point of restoring it with the air of a tragedy-queen who delivers a cup of poison to her betrayer, when she perceived that the hard look had become quite blotted out by a sort of gathering mist which obscured her grandmother's spectacles. Pauline is down on her knees in an instant; the Crokers' party assumes the proportions of a witches' dance, and she herself is a matricide whose right hand should be lopped off before she is led to a well-merited execution.

"*Petite grand'mère*, do be angry, please, but don't be sorry, I implore you. Why don't you put me *en pénitence*, like Chubby? I never want to dance again unless it is a *pas seul* in the verandah. It is all the fault of my instincts. Fourier would put me in a section of dancing dervishes, and I should skip for the rest of the community, and you, *petite grand'mère*, would belong to the priesthood and instruct us how to live while I was capering in the sunshine!"

Madame Delaunay rubs her spectacles with a half smile in her eyes, and Chubby thinks the moment an auspicious one for neglecting the pencil-case of his brother-in-law's grocer, and making a sudden onslaught



on a peaceable-looking cat, blinking in dreamless repose on the hearthrug.

"*Dis donc, mon enfant*, is it then for the distraction *pur et simple* of the manœuvres of the dance that you regret so much not to go to-night?"

The eyes that were baffled by the little hole in the needle's end are searching enough now; the eyes that made so light of the little hole are the eyes that are brought to confusion. Pauline turns up the book. She would fain take refuge in Comte.

"It is for the *tout ensemble*, *grand'mère*; the dancing more especially, of course."

"Thou art a Jesuit, my daughter! Is it that the first comer inspires thee with so much interest, that thou wouldst forget thy mother's fate and listen to the first man who has made soft eyes in thy direction?"

"But he hasn't made soft eyes, *grand'mère*! I only wish he would." This latter half *sotto voce*.

"How knowest thou, then, of whom I speak?"

The blood which comes so grudgingly into Pauline's cheeks finds its way there now, and paints them for an instant with a colour like the inside of a shell.

"I know you want to put me to confusion, *grand'mère*, and I know I don't deserve it. Please let us return to our muttons in the guise of Comte, and tell me whether I may skip his prosy reflections on history."

Madame Delaunay does not reply, and Pauline sees that her thoughts have left the *Philosophie Positive*, and that bygone scenes are shaping themselves before her eyes—scenes such as we all live over again, wondering the while to what end has been all the heart-sickness, the disappointment, the despair. The poor woman was like that scalt child who is so proverbially wary of approaching the fire; to her the name of lover was as the name of a ghoul, who would devour her little white maiden by stealth. Her granddaughter ponders on the last words that had been said. Has Sir Francis Segrave really made soft eyes? She thinks not. Has she herself betrayed by ever so slight a change that he has found favour in her eyes? It is a humiliating suggestion. Pauline refutes it angrily in her own mind, and registers an inward vow that neither her grandmother nor any one else in the whole world shall



ever have the faintest reason for conjecturing that she has given Sir Francis a passing thought. With this laudable determination duly recorded in her brain, she makes a feint of yawning.

"*Grand mère!* Comte's positivism always sends me to the regions of dreamland. *Bon soir, et dormez bien!* Chubby, if it were not derogating from your dignity as an uncle, I should take you under my arm and carry you straight off to bed."



## CHAPTER IV.

### *GEORGE GOES A-COURTING.*

“Doubt thou the stars are fire,  
Doubt that the sun doth move,  
Doubt truth to be a liar,  
But never doubt I love.”—SHAKSPERE.

IN New South Wales, spring had at length given place to sultry, scorching summer. The hot sun shone fiercely down upon city and suburb. The narrow streets of Sydney, lying in a glare of white heat, hid themselves in clouds of warm dust, which the wind carried round in a giddy whirl, together with straws and odds-and-ends, and all sorts of refuse, to be turned to account for the good of generations yet unborn; nature being the only power which can balance her profit and loss account to a hair. In the evening, when the sun, arrayed like young Joseph in a coat of many colours, sank slowly behind the distant hills, and the small islets in the harbour, catching the reflection of his fading glories, glowed under his copper-coloured light, and soft cool breezes breathing of brine and freshness came in from the ocean—the warm, weary inhabitants sauntered out into gardens and verandahs, to rejoice in an existence which had seemed some hours before an unnecessary and superfluous burden. Then the waited-upon division of mankind, thirstily inclined, refreshed itself with ices and tea and strong waters; or, metaphysically inclined, lost itself in vague day-dreams or fanciful speculations; or, actively inclined, betook itself to croquet, to riding, or to swimming; and the waiting-upon division ran hither and thither to minister to its wants, perchance thirsty or ruminative itself, but habituated to ignore its own sensations for the behoof of the afore-mentioned favoured portion of the human race.



On such an evening as this, somewhere about the middle of January, George Drafton, giddy with the sound of the relentless screw, left the deck of the S.S. *City of Adelaide* to betake himself to the Royal Hotel, where he fell asleep that night with Pauline's name on his lips. He woke in the morning to see the pale light dimly shaping out the unfamiliar objects from the gloom and darkness around him.

The details of his toilet were no unimportant matter that morning to George.

"How vain we are! how pleased to show  
Our clothes, and call them fine and new!"

says Dr. Watts, or some such eminent divine, in the fervour of his pious zeal, ever ready to nail backsliding Christians, and mercifully to convert small foibles into crimes for which Divine wrath is waiting a favourable opportunity to pounce upon us and consign us, according to Dr. Watts, to a "dreadful hell with everlasting pains." Sad! that even the pathos of this outburst of poetry, taught us as boys and girls, should not keep us as men and women from due attention to the outer husk, which Carlyle would say converts "man into a rag-screen, over-heaped with shreds and tatters, naked from the charnel-house of Nature."

Be that as it may, there are some rag-screens who dispose of their rags as Nature disposes of her divers coverings. Her princes and magnates may be said to be represented by her smiling landscapes and harmonious tints, and her beggars and castaways by her arid deserts and Dead Sea levels. We do well to copy her soft colours and varied radiance, having helped so often to deck her trees and flowers when the spark of self-consciousness was not there to torment the form we now assume. If there be "sermons in stones," shall there not be sermons in the mirror likewise, where man sees daily the shadow of a shadow, come—he knows not whence, going—he knows not whither.

It was not until George's mirror threw back a satisfactory reflection, not until he had arranged his cravat with a view to showing the requisite minimum of white shirt, that he made his way to the public breakfast-table, and thence to the nearest livery stables, a conscious



look on his face of expectant but not of assured triumph. He surveyed the hacks with the eye of a connoisseur. In the groom, a thick-set man with only one eye to the good, he discovered a kindred spirit. To him he recounted how he had won the Hay Steeplechase the year before last, and the year after, with a little horse of his own breaking in.

He stopped before a chestnut mare and examined her critically.

"As nice a filly, that, sir," said the one-eyed man, "as ever you put your leg across," and he led the mare out into the yard. "Too good for her work, by half!"

George nodded approval; he did not rhapsodise about strange horses.

"She looks to have some good points about her," he said; but he allowed the mare to be saddled, and rode her away.

I don't think he bestowed much thought upon her points after all. Memory was very busy with him just then, and as he trotted along he was recalling old impressions with a concentration of thought not usual to him.

It was one of those days when man is perforce an optimist for the time being. Sweet summer scents floated about in the warm balmy air; the bustle and hum of the far-off city was softened into an indistinct drowsy murmur by the distance.

Madame Delaunay's house was some few miles out of Sydney, and George's imagination transported him to the first occasion upon which he had travelled over that road. It was two years back he remembered—a day something like this. He had a letter in his pocket addressed—

"À MADAME,

"MADAME DELAUNAY.

"*Aux bons soins de M. George Drafton.*"

The French Consul whom he had met at his uncle's house at dinner the week before had given him this letter, in an effusive desire to show a due appreciation of Josiah's Mum and Chateau Lafitte. George remem-



bered that he was on foot, and while trudging along he had debated with himself as to the desirability of presenting M. le Consul's letter at all. He had nearly turned back when he reached the gate, arguing that he did not want any "Frenchified acquaintances in New South Wales. A priggish lot! I'd bet a sovereign!" he had thought, as he stood on the white doorstep with the knocker in his hand. "I hope to the Lord they're not at home!"

On what very trifles do the great events of our lives hang! You may reach the turning-point of your career to-day, and never know it for years hence until you look back through the vista of unheeded years and say, "Such and such an event decided me. If So-and-so had not met me, I should not have been here!" Or carry the principle to its extreme, and you may trace your very existence to a chance. If your mother had not sprained her ankle, she could never have known your father. Where then would *you* have been, oh subtle questioner? George, you may be sure, had no notion that when the door opened it would open upon his fate.

As the servant had shown him into the hall, a young girl ran breathlessly down the staircase which faced the entrance to the house. An instant later and George would have missed her, would never have seen her at all in all probability, and his destiny and hers would never, for good or evil, have crossed each other's paths.

But the relentless sisters who weave our fates from their never-ending flax had already entangled the threads of George Drafton's and Pauline Vyner's lives to come. It looked a tangled maze enough in their shrivelled fingers; here on earth the beginning of the knot had not as yet appeared.

George, still living over again every incident of that first meeting, remembered there had been a little boy waiting in the hall dressed in walking attire, and Pauline had run downstairs so fast that George had almost come into collision with her at the drawing-room door near the foot of the stairs. He saw her now as he had seen her then, the parted red lips half stammering out a laughing apology, her childish figure as she walked demurely past him and gave her hand to Chubby; he wondered afresh why it was that Pauline's face, Pauline's



expression, Pauline's whole self, in fact, should have imprinted itself on his heart after so indelible a fashion, not for a few weeks or months even, but for life, and (as he told himself) for eternity. He remembered that the "priggish" abode had thenceforth become an Arcadia for him, that he had invented a thousand excuses for going there with a diplomacy he had not supposed himself capable of exercising, and that he had felt intuitively that Pauline as yet took no heed of his love. In his anxiety to do something to further his cause, he made a confidante of Madame Delaunay on the eve of his departure from Sydney, and she had allowed him to flounder through his sentimental narrative without bestowing upon him the timely assistance of a single ejaculation. No one knew better than this discriminating Frenchwoman the various stages of an *affaire de cœur*.

"Il a la tête montée," she had said to herself; "cela passera, mais si on ce contrarie il serait capable de faire une sottise."

She was, moreover, beholden to him for his reticence, because it had deferred the arrival of an epoch in Pauline's life to which she looked forward with forebodings of the gloomiest description. She felt that the principles which had served as her own guide in life had not saved her child from all sorts of bitter experiences, and she feared that Pauline's application of the same principles meant the seizing of any apparent gratification without forethought. She recognised an element in her grandchild's character which George had failed to perceive, and she was touched by the delicacy which prevented a young man overwhelmed by the pressure of a first strong sentiment from converting a naïve school-girl into the precocious damsel called by the *Saturday Review* a "green peach."

So she replied to him encouragingly—

"It is necessary to be reasonable, Monsieur Shorge. You cannot devellaupé the sentiment you seek to awaken in a child. At present she heeds but her class and her *ami de cœur*, the little Ernest. I am convinced that you are a brave young man, and your research of my granddaughter does me honour, but I will exact one condition of your part. During two



years come not again, and if you do not change of advice, we will discuss the affair at the end of that time."

"Et il ne m'ennuiera pas encore, cet apôtre-là," she thought, as she watched the departure of the dejected George, with a sense of triumph in her diplomatic skill. But she built her hopes on a too certain belief in her own powers of penetration. George, much to his own astonishment, did not "change of advice," as Madame Delaunay had foreseen, during the two probationary years; that is to say, among the young women whom he flirted with, none created in him the feeling which Pauline had excited. "There's not one of them that can hold a candle to her," he said to himself after dancing at a Melbourne ball with guileless partners, who smiled upon Josiah Carp's nephew. His chief dread now was lest he should find her altered; no longer the quaint admixture of womanliness and childishness which had taken him captive at first. Then, as to her looks——

But at this point George's meditations came to an end. The familiar iron gate was before him; his fingers trembled as he leant over his horse's side and unfastened the bolt.

The tapering firs were nodding to each other in a stately fashion as he rode over the white quartz which glittered in his path. A whole conclave was gathered in the verandah, and he moved towards it with beating pulses. Fifine in the centre of the group, gesticulating to a Chinaman, who, with the stolid apathy characteristic of a Chinese hawker, was watching the barbarians handle his ivory fans, his pagodas, and his disjointed acrobats—Madame Delaunay, whose youthful period of the day had not yet set in, standing at the open French window, in genuine foreign *négligé* (few Frenchwomen look dressed before twelve o'clock)—and leaning over the back of a verandah chair, her chin resting on her hand, her eyes fixed on the wash-leather face of the yellow-ochre-hued Mongolian, stood George's idol, Pauline.

Of a surety, the carbon and oxygen which sustain the breath of life in these two creatures' bodies must have come from different sources. The same trees and flowers cannot have prepared the air they breathe; cannot have



helped to dower the one with a creamy skin of softest texture, and the other with a repulsive hide of tan; the one with lustrous eyes which flash out messages from the soul within, the other with winking slits which peer out uneasily upon the surrounding foe.

Pendant from John Chinaman's cranium is his long unwholesome tail of coarse black yarn; swept up in an encircling glory from Pauline's white neck, her dark hair is packed in a compact mass against her shapely little head. All this time she is silently espousing the cause of her unconscious foil.

In Australia it is a sort of established custom to beat down a Chinaman. Were he to ask you half the value of his ware, you would of necessity offer him a quarter. He has therefore learnt to forestall you by asking twice its value, and then accepting the sum you may bestow upon him with apparent indifference.

Fifine, in a sprightly cap, which savours of the "Boulevard du Temple," is bidding for a little teapot on Madame Delaunay's behalf. She holds it up before the Chinaman, and looks at him insinuatingly.

"How mosh, Jean?"

"Tiddely-sixpence."

"Oh! tiddely-sixpence too mosh! Tree shilling! dat do you? Come, say now, tree shilling! you nevere get more! Vill you do so? Come now! For Madame—is it not?"

The Mongolian shakes his head. "No savey—me no savey," he says.

"Dites donc, Mamzelle Pauline—mais je vous demande un peu? Faut il se laisser piller par ce drôle!"

Pauline comes to the rescue. "Let me arrange it with him, Fifine. Now, John—— Oh, Mr. Drafton, where *did* you come from? How do you do? I had no idea you were in Sydney!"

"I only arrived last night," says George, his eyes assuming that uncomfortably tender expression some men cannot conceal in the presence of the woman they love. "If you will allow me, I will just tie my moke up to the verandah railings."

Madame Delaunay accords him her hand, with rage in her heart, but in her voice there is nothing but an inflexion of courtly welcome.



"*Enfin*, Monsieur Shorge! You come to find us *en prise* with what you call a Celestial!"

"Let me tackle him, madame," says George, when she releases his hand. "I'm used to dealing with these fellows! Now, John, what for you sell this?" holding up the teapot.

It is likewise a received custom that, in order to improve a Chinaman's diction, he should be addressed in the sort of gibberish which is usually talked to babies—no doubt with the same end in view.

"Tiddely-sixpence."

"Tiddely devils! I beg your pardon, Miss Vyner! It's the only talk they understand. Him dear for half-crown, John! No one give you two shillings. Here you are! There's the half-crown. Hand over the teapot."

"Welly good," replies John, in the same tone in which he would have accepted five shillings, or received the assurance that his head was to be cut off the same evening. Chinamen are like cows, who are fatalists from instinct, and who would be run over with supreme complacency rather than move out of the way.

George deprecates indignantly the refunding of his two-and-sixpence, and the Mongolian shoulders his yoke, wherefrom depend his two portable markets, and runs off at the particular jog-trot affected by his countrymen.

"Do sit down, Mr. Drafton," Pauline says, while Mrs. Delaunay sweeps backward into the drawing-room, all her latent dread coming to life in her expression. "The verandah is our ante-chamber, our reception-room, our everything in the summer-time."

It was easy to see indeed that the verandah did duty for various purposes. It was full of lounges which had a marvellous knack of detaining their occupants for an unreasonable time. Here Chubby battled with his Ollendorff, and Pauline filled the vases with clusters of fragrant azaleas. At one end the verandah was enclosed in glass, and adorned by a collection of flower-pots dignified by the name of the "conservatory."

It was probably an unconscious sympathy for rotundity in any form which had made Chubby lay claim to all the fat pots that had been brought into the place. They stood in an imposing row, like the trunks of beef-



eaters, labelled in hieroglyphics—Chubby, a medicinal plant—or Chubby, a poisonous plant—or Chubby, a plant *not to be touched*. In Pauline's pots, the ferns springing each out of its little clump of moss carried all sorts of suggestions of cool rivulets, and wet river-banks, and the subdued splashing of fresh water. Chubby cultivated a carrot-top in emulation of Pauline's ferns, and watched with childish malice for the tripping of such visitors as did not distinguish immediately between carrots and ferns.

George is wondering in what respect Pauline has altered as he sinks, rather precipitately, into a low-seated chair at her side. He cannot realise that this grand-looking girl with the colourless face and marvellous eyes is the child into whose docile fingers he first put the reins only two years ago. He would like the old Pauline to come back for a moment that he might find himself on an easy footing with her, and when this was established he would like the new Pauline to take her place and remain exactly as he sees her now. Well content, he lets his eyes rest upon her and says nothing. Pauline, meanwhile, has mentally registered three things in George's favour; that he is broader, that he is browner, and that he does not suck the knob handle of his whip as of yore.

"Well, Mr. Drafton?" she asks at last, in a sort of mock inquisitorial style, so entirely a part of the old Pauline that all the diffidence engendered by the two years' absence melts out of George's manner at once, "has your fond uncle given you a holiday, or have you run away from him at last?"

"Not much fear of my running away, so long as he does not give me too much of his company. Last time he showed up at the station we made it pretty hot for him one way and another. You should have seen him round up the shearers; but I didn't let him 'boss around' much while I was in the way."

"I'm afraid you won't be the prop of your poor old relative's declining days! You used to speak of him in a much more dutiful spirit. But in another way you're not a bit changed. Do you remember how I used to say that I always felt the want of a pocket dictionary when you talked to me?"



George laughed. In all good faith he would have said of himself that he had the "gift of the gab."

"Oh, because I've got hold of a few Americanisms, you mean! That's nothing. That's Yankee style. By George! you should hear some of the Melbourne fellows talk. They're half Yanks as it is!"

"How do you mean? In their use of slang, or in their ideas?"

"Oh! the whole set out! They go in for all the games—poker and euchre—and the drinks! All the best drinks come from America."

Just a shade of vexation sweeps across Pauline's face.

"You won't take me *au sérieux*, Mr. Drafton? I don't suppose their ideas are embodied in their drinks."

"Don't be rough on me, Miss Vyner," says George, with cunning humility. "It's as much as I can do to take stock of my own ideas just at this moment. You don't know how I've looked forward to this day. You don't know"—

The break in George's voice at this point gives such terrible earnestness to his unmeaning words that the girl is fain to stop their flow with a half irritated sense of frightened triumph. His tone is a sudden revelation to her, but it awakens no responsive sentiment on her part.

"Please don't mind my interrupting you, but do you ever chase the Chinamen now?—you know"—for George, brought back to the most realistic of his reminiscences, loses the tender expression for one of genuine bewilderment. "Oh! you've not forgotten, surely,"—with a deprecatory nod—"the Chinamen that stole the gold?"

"Oh! ah!" says George, relieved. "When I was on the Coliban. I know! The fellows that fossicked for gold in the river bed. I used to chivy them up with the stockwhip."

"Yes, that was it"—she is anxious to pursue the topic of the Chinamen, having made shipwreck of the Americans and their ideas. "And—and—you don't—what do you call it?—chivy them now?"

But Mr. Drafton's feelings are not to be diverted from the groove into which he has directed them. He looks fixedly at her fair face.



"What a one you are for remembering things! Still I'd lay level money that I remember more about those talks than you do. Do you remember what you promised me that time your hair came down near the Point?"

He leans forward eagerly and sees the tardy colour burning in the downcast face. But there is more confusion than pleasure in its expression.

"I remember," she answers hesitatingly, "that—I—have—said a great many things in my life for which I should not care to be called to account now. In fact, I think it would put a stop to most ordinary conversation if a shorthand writer could jot down all one said at the time of one's saying it. There would be so much to be ashamed of afterwards."

She smoothes down the folds of her morning dress, after delivering herself of a sentiment which might have originated in the mind of a Spartan matron. George uneasily wonders whether he has been snubbed. He gazes earnestly at vacancy for an inspiration. The tall *pinus cygneus* on the grass plot in front, with their candle-like cones standing each in stiff distinctness a little apart from the other, look like giant Christmas trees all ready to be lit up for a *fête*.

"How the pines have shot up!" he says aloud, with a somewhat subdued intonation. "How did the croquet ground turn out? If you don't mind, I'd like to take a turn round the old place."

"And I shall like to show it you," Pauline replies, anxious to make amends for the douche she has applied to George's fervour. "Wait a moment while I get my hat; and shall I send the boy to take your horse to the stable?"

"Oh, she'll stand right enough."

"Well, will you have some claret and water after your ride? or would you like to concoct one of those 'drinks' you were so enthusiastic about just now?"

"I wasn't enthusiastic about them. May I never touch a drop of liquor again if I care for drink! I'd rather stick to water for the rest of my days than have you think I was given to swiping!"

"I shouldn't know what it meant, if you told me



you were given to it. But you haven't told me what you'll have."

"Nothing—upon my honour! I'll wait for you here in the verandah."

He rose from his chair and sauntered towards one of the pillars as Pauline disappeared, where he beat time with his whip to an inward accompaniment of "Tommy Dodd." His elation was sobered by the grave aspect of Madame Delaunay, who came noiselessly up to him. She too felt that he had gained in manliness since she had seen him. His beard and moustache were bushier. There were traces, she fancied, of thought and meditation in his eyes, which had acquired indeed a more earnest expression than formerly. George himself would have supposed they showed traces of loo-parties and unfulfilled "Doubles," and would most probably have prescribed himself a "Pick-me-up." He was somewhat in awe of Pauline's grandmother, never feeling himself quite at ease in her presence. He was troubled with a sort of latent consciousness that were it possible for her to gauge his abilities and strength of character, and to see, laid bare before her, the inner workings of his mind, she would send him away, as he stood there bare-headed in the sunshine, and conjure him, for Pauline's sake and his own, never to come again on the errand which had brought him to-day. There was an uneasy fear at work within him, whenever he was alone with her, that she would go beyond his depth; and in a very modified degree, he had something of the same feeling with regard to Pauline.

"I won't give her a chance of flooring me," he said to himself; "I'll take the bull by the horns—see if I don't!"

He drew forward a chair for her deferentially, and began with a preliminary clearing of the throat. It was his custom to call her Madam, because she went by the name of "Madame" in the household, and once long ago, when he had said "Mrs. Delaunay," every one in the room had looked as shocked as if he had spoken of the Queen as Mrs. Albert.

"You see, Madam, I've been as good as my word! You said I could try—don't you remember saying so?"



—that I could try for myself at the end of two years. I'm more in earnest than ever about what I told you. You won't stand in my light now, will you?"

He was twitching at the leaves of the scarlet passion-flower that had twisted itself round the verandah railings as he spoke. George had no repose of manner. When he was agitated, hands, feet, and eyebrows were all at work.

Madame Delaunay's English all but forsakes her in the desire to discourage him, without implying in too uncomplimentary a fashion that she does not want him for a grandson-in-law.

"One is not pressed, Monsieur Shorge; one is not pressed!"

"I don't know what you call pressed, Madam! After a fellow's had only one thought in his head, night and day, for over two years, it's rather rough on him to be crossed just when he thinks he's got a pretty fair show of success."

"But do you figure to yourself seriously that Pauline would render you happy?"

She did not ask him whether he thought he could render Pauline happy. Dividing men, according to the rule of a great French novelist, into the two classes of those who understand women and those who don't, George must have belonged to the latter division. Madame Delaunay herself had known the rare bliss of being associated with one of the other kind—a man who had made her happy through all the best years of her life in the best possible way, by never falling short of her first estimate of him. Enthusiasm for a pursuit is only a more satisfying feeling than enthusiasm for an individual because it is not attended by the same invariable disappointment. If men only knew the heart-sickness of discovering all the alloy, the dross, the common earth, so carefully concealed during the days when, like birds, they attune their voices and smooth their plumes to go a-courting, they would maintain some few delusions a little longer, when the courting was over. Women as a rule are easily imposed upon, and it is clumsy policy to shatter their idols when they are so anxious for something to worship.

There was so dreary an intonation in Madame



Delaunay's somewhat laboured enunciation, as she put this question to George, that it almost forced him into an instant's deep thought.

"I'd take my chance of that, thank you," he said; "and mind you, Madam, Miss Pauline shouldn't want for a thing I had it in my power to give her. She'd have the best mount in the district, I can tell you; and she could always have a friend to stop with her any time she felt dull."

Pauline did not hear this elaborate scheme on her behoof. She came out of the house in a big straw hat, which George, under his present impression that she was an angel, dimly connected with a halo radiating from the aureole which encircled her head. His angel led him to the croquet lawn, discoursing the while upon the laying down of turf as if that branch of practical gardening had been included in her school-bill under the heading of "Washing, gymnastics, extras, &c."—thence to the lemon grove, where she rigorously confined George to the subject of shaddocks, and finally to the new bathing-house, where he pleads sudden fatigue, and finds a resting-place on the narrow strip of beach which fronts the bay. Pauline is fain to rest herself too.

The tide most quietly ebbing beneath them, as it rises and falls leaves with each heave a long line of broken shells and tangled sea-weed and parti-coloured scum upon the sand at their feet. These are the hostages the great ocean deposits with mother earth as it shrinks from her shores, hostages which it cannot fail to reclaim ere long and toss and tumble in its briny embrace, and with monotonous regularity leave behind it again and sweep away again as it has done for so many thousand years in the past, as it will do for so many thousand years in the future. The warm air about them is trembling and quivering, like the air which dances over a roaring bush-fire; the outlines of the distant hills are soft and hazy under the bright hot sun, not sharp and distinct against the blue sky, but seeming to melt into it and blend with it as the deep colour on the petals of an iris merges into the soft surrounding hues.

George is not incapable of being moved by such a scene, but he would like his companion to understand



that he has not come all the way to Sydney only to admire a fine harbour on a hot morning. He regards the broad hat appealingly.

"How well you are looking, Miss Pauline," he says, for the third time, and now there is a suffusion of sentimental yearning in his eyes. "May I call you Miss Pauline? You don't look like Miss Vyner, somehow."

"You must have expected to find me at the point of death, at the very least," she answers, laughing shortly, "you seem so astonished to find me in ordinary health. You're like grandma, who was so taken aback the other day because a rheumatic old woman whom she had treated to a blister told her she was pretty spry, and that she didn't want any of her doctoring. Oh yes, call me Miss Pauline, of course, if you like; only it's a little like the gardener; still, I don't like being called Miss Vyner much either."

"Do you remember what I used to call you when I was here before? I've never forgotten those rides we had together—never. You can't tell how often I've thought of them. I always said they were out and out the jolliest—I mean the happiest hours I ever spent in my life."

"You must be very amiable to find so much happiness in teaching any one how to hold the reins properly. Who was your next pupil after me?"

"I didn't want any more. I wouldn't have had one for something after you."

"An equivocal compliment, that! How am I to take it?"

"Oh, you know what I mean," says George, his sentimentalism very genuine and red hot by this time. "I'm no hand at paying compliments. That's the worst of me. I feel fifty per cent. more than I can say. I've bottled up what I thought about you over two years and more. I can't keep it in any longer. On my honour, I can't. Don't get up—I entreat you. Don't mind my taking your hand—just for one minute. I beseech you, Pauline, hear a fellow out! Ever since I was here before that time, I've never had you out of my head for a day. Don't be vexed with me! I wouldn't have spoken about it now, only I couldn't help it, somehow."



I only want you to say you're not fond of any one else, that's all, and that you might get to care about me, you know. You can't imagine—it's no use telling you—the sort of feeling I've got for you. I didn't think it was in me to care so much for any one."

All this time Pauline is silent. Perhaps she scarcely hears the last part of his speech. George sees her pull her broad-brimmed hat closer over her downcast face; there is a pulse beating somewhere near her throat she never felt before, and her heart has taken to running a small race against it, so that she feels all throbs and beats from her brain downwards.

His voice is more subdued than before.

"You're not offended, Miss Pauline?" he asks. "I'll go when you like, you know; but won't you give me some sort of a hope first? I only came across to Sydney for this!"

No answer.

The soft sea breeze has freshened into a wind, and out at sea there are tiny flakes of white, dancing, bobbing, struggling with each other, appearing and disappearing, coming nearer, and pirouetting about the boats and ships like tiny sprites playing at hide-and-seek.

George begins to feel uncomfortable. He applies himself busily to the work of boring a hole in the sand at his feet with the butt end of his riding-whip. This is a drilling operation which requires some nicety.

Next time he speaks his tones are hoarse.

"There'll be nothing left for me to do, I suppose, but to go and hang myself. My God! it's a nice thing to give yourself up heart and soul to one girl, and then to be treated to the cold shoulder!"

There is such real passion in his voice that Pauline jumps up from her resting-place.

"Please don't, Mr. Drafton"—this very pleadingly. "I do so wish you wouldn't. Don't you think we'd better come back to the house now?"

She stands before him while George probes the loose sand more viciously than ever, making never a move towards rising the while.

"Don't what? Don't tell you what I had on the tip of my tongue a dozen times when I was here before! If you'd waited as long as I have, you might be in



a hurry to speak too. However, the murder's out now, and I'm not sorry for it. O Pauline!" with a sudden imploring desperation in his eyes, "for heaven's sake don't drive me from you. I can be anything you choose to make me. Give me a chance—only one. Do you want me to go to the dogs altogether?"

An expression of pained perplexity in Pauline's face is all that he can see as he looks hungrily up at her where she stands.

She is a novice, and moreover a coward.

In her embarrassment she pulls out a bit of frippery in the shape of a handkerchief from a little slit in her black silk apron, and twists it nervously round her wrist as she replies confusedly and with hesitation—

"You make me so sorry—for you, I mean. It isn't my fault if I can't care for anybody, much—in that way, at least—is it? I never did. I don't think I ever shall. But all sorts of things may happen in the future. Do let us forget what you said just now. Some one has been cooeing frantically to us for the last five minutes."

And George finds a loophole of hope in her answer. She is already half way up the garden path before he overtakes her, and while he is wondering how to renew the attack, a dumpling of a boy with sagacious eyes hurls himself against Pauline, and walks by her side with an air of proprietorship.

"How d'ye do, little man?" says George condescendingly, putting out his hand.

"How do you do, sir?" says the little man stiffly, raising his garden hat. "You are an acquaintance of Paul—of Miss Vyner's, I believe. I have the honour to be her maternal uncle."

All George's wrought up feelings cannot prevent his breaking into a guffaw.

Ah me! Are they all on a par then? Chubby's dignity, and George's longings, and Pauline's aspirations? All an outlet of the same force which pulls the strings that set us—earthly puppets—dancing for a while, until the dance of death whirls us out of sight and memory.



## CHAPTER V.

### TITTLE-TATTLE.

“ Words are like leaves, and where they most abound,  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.”

—POPE.

JAMESINA CROKER and her mamma were engrossed in the all-absorbing pursuit of matching, or endeavouring to match, a corner of grey silk, the size of a thumb-nail, with fringe of a like description, at Fimbria's. An officious shopman had already outraged all their sense of the fitness of things by proposing to graft a shade of “gree-purl” upon a shade of “gree-sangdray” (this by the way, as a specimen of the shopman's conception of the fore-mentioned words), and Miss Croker had remarked, in a “stage aside,” that colour-blind people should not serve in shops. Judge then of the jaded condition of the lady and her daughter as they wearily returned to their carriage, waved therein by the foreman. Their first active measure was to consult a little ivory tablet lying on the seat containing a list of the afternoon's engagements.

“To call on the Delaunays,” said Mrs. Croker languidly, having scratched through the name of Fimbria with unnecessary vigour; “your papa insists on it, my dear. They're people of shocking principles—quite shocking, I think—but it's a matter of fact that they have the *entrée* everywhere.”

Mrs. Croker having been espoused for her china shepherdess complexion by a very rich man, at a time when she was wont to ground little children in the frailest possible foundations of orthography and the major scales, laid especial stress upon the social condition of all who were on her visiting list.

Miss Jamesina inherited her mamma's complexion of mind as well as of face.

“Pauline Vyner doesn't go to half the places she's asked



to, ma! Really it would be hard to say just what set she's in. She's never come properly out yet."

"Madame Delaunay does nothing like anybody else," replied her mother, promptly condemnatory; "she has dreadful notions. It's all very well for your father to say she's a foreigner. I'm sure there are almost as proper foreigners as English people. Look at that dear Madame Merle, who wouldn't even let her groom go out on Sunday unless he told her first what place of worship he meant to attend. She's of Swiss descent, I believe. And then all those Huguenots we saw at the opera the other night. That's all a matter of history; and they were most of them French, I think."

"I daresay, ma; but hadn't you better make up your mind where we're going?"

"Oh! to Beau-Séjour, Wilson," Mrs. Croker says, in the loudest treble she can affect, and the ladies settle themselves back in the attitude of fashionable apathy cultivated by polite society in the nineteenth century.

"To here what gentleness these women have,  
If we could know it for our rudeness."

Thus Chaucer, who probably never heard two of these "goodly and angelic creatures" talking over their acquaintances. But Miss Jamesina and her mamma were not bad-hearted folk, as the world goes, though they fastened with keen relish upon the failings of the people they were about to see.

The iron gates of Beau-Séjour were closed. Mrs. Croker's supercilious eyebrows contract with vexation.

"Oh dear, dear! What is to be done, Jamesina? How annoying, to be sure. I cannot have you opening the gate in sight of the drawing-room window, and I'm sure I won't trust Wilson off the box for an instant. We must never leave Peter at home again on any pretext whatever. What shall we do?"

"Oh, wait for some dirty little boy," suggests Jamesina, in whose experience all little boys available for gate opening purposes are dirty.

But the dirty little boy presents himself in the guise of a young man mounted on a chestnut of metallic lustre.

George shows to marvellous advantage on horseback. He knows how to make the filly curvet at the gate just



enough to prove that it is not every one who could open it on her back. He is conscious of being looked at, as he leans over her side with easy grace and swings open the heavy iron doors. As he backs the chestnut to let the carriage pass, and takes off his hat while the ladies drive through, there is an "Allez houp-là" flavour about the whole affair which gives it the appearance of a triumphal entry. Even the long-enduring filly, obliged to render ignoble submission to the first "Sunday-outer" who comes to her master's stables, feels it incumbent upon her to show off. She lays back her ears, and attempts to prance up the path sideways, with her nose towards the myrtles bordering the avenue.

"Dash the brute!" says George; "what's the matter with her all of a sudden?"

He represses the exuberance of her spirits by a cut with his whip, and the chestnut, suddenly brought back to a recollection of its unhappy lot in life, returns to its usual spiritless trot, and arrives at the front door in the rear of the carriage.

George's appearance has deepened the Hebe-like bloom in Miss Jamesina's cheeks. Her mamma remembers that they have not committed themselves, and that if the young man should turn out to be one of the Delaunays' "queer people" they are not obliged to recognise him unless he happens to be in their set. George, however, does not follow them into the drawing-room. He finds the usual standing-place for the suppressed filly, and takes her into favour again by bestowing upon her a conciliatory slap while he tells her to "stand over."

Madame Delaunay's austere face, softened by the lacy drapery of her afternoon toilette, rounded by the art which she would have defended in her coldly-considered views upon æsthetic questions, showed in almost scornful contrast by the side of Mrs. Croker's faded charms. There was almost as much dissimilarity between the girls. Jamesina's limpid blue eyes, and cheeks which suggested that rose-coloured blood must run in her veins—her forehead, guiltless of knobs or projections, smoothly white under an edifice of fluffy flax, presented a type of the beauty that one involuntarily associates with flower-beds, and silken couches, and the costly sweets of life. Jamesina with her hair frouzy,



her skin sunburnt, her face heated, would have had not much more attraction than a doll that has been put before the fire after its owner has tried to comb its towy hair with a corkscrew.

She was of the Louis XV., the Watteau, the Boucher, the porcelain period.

Of Pauline one could hardly say that she belonged to any period. In olden times great colourists like Titian and Da Vinci loved to lay upon their canvas shades of warm brown colour which the sun might prick into life. This was the hue of Pauline's hair, of her eyebrows, of her eyes. For the rest she might have been bloodless, save for her scarlet lips. It was not essential in her case, as in Jamesina's, to imagine a background for her person. Put her at the wash-tub, than which there is no more trying position for a woman, or send her in tatters to drive geese through a field like Grimm's princess—you could not root out her birthright. When the human race was still young enough to be imaginative, before the superstition and the poetry had been reasoned out of it; when instead of the flippant and vulgar spirits which the present age discovers in its tables and chairs, the fanciful children of Nature saw leaf-crowned nymphs in every tree that soliloquises in the forest, it would have been supposed that Autumn with a train of hamadryades had danced round her cradle at her birth.

Like Tennyson's heroine, gowned in pure white that fitted to the shape, she came on to the verandah to ask her persistent lover to come inside. Her grandmother, while sweeping past her into the drawing-room, had remarked, "That young man would put himself on the foot of *l'ami de la maison*. Go, tell him to enter, my child, and be not long to do the commission."

George's face, of all faces in the world the most prone to betray its owner's secrets, became irradiated as Pauline advanced towards him. His eyes wandered from the rounded arms, the whiter for their transparent covering, to the smooth shoulders, the little round throat, and the mutinous mouth he loved so well. He was perplexed at his own state of mind. "I'm in for it now, and no mistake," he reflected. "Hang me if I'm not as bad as a school-boy with an attack



of calf-love! Why, I grudge the place that bit of black stuff takes up round her neck!"

His expression showed so plainly the nature of his thoughts that Pauline was abashed. She delivered her message tersely. "You're to come into the drawing-room, please, Mr. Drafton, grandmamma says, at once."

Thereupon right about face, and a quick march towards the room in question. George walks behind her, and the long mirror opposite the drawing-room door reflects as he enters the expression of a man hopelessly in love. Miss Jamesina is quick to interpret such signs. Her eyes dart from George to Pauline in a space of time too short to be accounted time to our blundering perceptions, but the girl's cold face betrays no emotion whatever. Madame Delaunay too has watched George as he follows Pauline into the room, and can hardly restrain herself sufficiently to introduce him to her visitors in due form.

"Missees Crauker, permit me to present to you Mr. Drafton—Mees Crauker, permit me. Mr. Drafton, put yourself, I pray you. Pauline, my child, Mees Crauker comes from telling me that a prince, the son of the Queen of England, will make shortly a visit to Sydney. Thus many young persons will be presented that they may profit of the *fêtes* that one will give on this occasion. Do you desire likewise to be of their number?"

"I am sure Miss Vyner has too much loyalty not to say 'Yes,'" breaks in Mrs. Croker. "Only think! we shall be the first Australians he sees! It's a great joy, I am sure, but a great responsibility for us all, you know! One of the gentlemen on the committee of reception was talking to me at a dinner at Government House the other night. 'What would you suggest, Mrs. Croker?' he said. 'Suggest!' I said, 'dear me! I'd pave the streets with gold—that he was to drive over!'"

"It would be a good way of making him think the people were prostrating themselves before him, at least," says Pauline. "What a stooping and a scrabbling there would be! I should instantly become a money-grubber in the most realistic sense possible."

Mrs. Croker discerns a flavour of laxity and want of respect in this prosaic view of her proposition.



"Oh, my dear Miss Vyner, I'm sure nobody would want bribing to make them bow to the earth when his Royal Highness goes by. I shall never forget, I'm sure, what *my* feelings were like on the solemn occasion when I first saw her Majesty. I believe after all I didn't see more than the top of her bonnet, for by the time the carriage came close to me I was so overcome I fainted clean away!"

"What a sell if it hadn't been the Queen at all?" remarks George naively; "I suppose any woman in a poke bonnet would have done as well!"

"You deceive yourself, Monsieur Shorge," said Madame Delaunay grimly. "The kings and the queens come into the world the sceptre in the hand. If in effect it does not find itself there actually, the image of it is always in the minds of the people. Thus it is evident that the monarchs are made otherwise than we. I too when I was young did see Charles Dix eat his dinner. Mon Dieu! I had him in pity. He did eat so much and of such good meat, that I persuaded myself he would weep if one retired his plate. You must admit that it was a spectacle to inspire some reverence!"

Mrs. Croker is dimly conscious that if she stays much longer Jamesina's pretty little ears will be polluted by the necessity of their taking in some further proof of the quite shocking principles or lack of principles of this reckless Frenchwoman. She would pity Pauline, only she is quite sure (for Mrs. Croker is always sure of something or other) in her own mind that the girl is no better than her grandmother. How any one can admire her is a marvel to Mrs. Croker. A pale-faced, sulky-looking young woman, with a sort of style about her to be sure, carrying her head well, and with a fine head of hair, for those who liked reddish hair.

All the time she carries on this train of thought in one half of her brain, the other half is busily engaged in conjecturing as to whether George is a young man of means or expectations. Mrs. Croker would have been a large subscriber to such a paper as jesters say is published in different watering-places in America, containing full information with respect to the family and possessions of all strangers. What a blessing to know just how wide or how chilling a smile to bestow! How



embarrassing to have no definite guide to enable one to regulate the amount of cordiality to infuse into one's voice.

While Miss Croker and Pauline inveigle Madame Delaunay into listening to the list of rumoured parties to be given when the Duke of Edinburgh comes, Mrs. Croker warily feels her way with George.

"Very warm, Mr. Drafton, is it not?"

This is said with the utmost blandness, while the eyebrows remain at their accustomed elevation. So far Mrs. Croker is on her guard.

"'Pon my word," replies George, uncrossing his legs, "I've felt it hotter in Melbourne. The people on our side talk a lot about the Sydney heat, but really I don't think it's a patch to what you get on the Murray."

"Indeed," says the lady, clutching at the opening presented by George's answer. "I'm sure it's quite a consolation to hear that it can be hotter anywhere else, though I suppose in the bush you don't know what to do with yourselves in the hot weather? Do you live in the bush, Mr. Drafton?"

"Rather!" says George decisively. "I've not been much anywhere else since I first went up country for my uncle years ago."

Mrs. Croker jumps at the opportunity. George evidently means her to ask the question which follows.

"For your uncle, you say, Mr. Drafton? May I ask his name? Mr. Croker knows so many Melbourne people."

George tries to look imperturbable as he replies in the usual formula—"Josiah Carp—that's my uncle—of Cavil and Carp. I daresay you've heard of them before."

Heard of them! Mrs. Croker is in raptures. For the first time she notices what a good-looking, gentlemanly young man is Mr. Drafton. Nothing in fact is more conducive to a gentlemanly bearing than the possession of a childless uncle whose sheep-farming operations are more extensive than Abrahams.

One would say that an internal tuning operation had been performed on the organs of Mrs. Croker's voice next time she speaks.

"I'm enchanted, I'm sure, Mr. Drafton, to have had the pleasure of meeting you. Jamesina, my love, we must persuade Madame Delaunay and Miss Vyner to join our little expedition on Thursday—and I hope,



Mr. Drafton, you will come too, and not stand upon ceremony. Mr. Croker shall call and ask you. Our young people are so fond of country excursions, you know—and then there's Master Delaunay as well! Now, may I reckon on seeing all your party, Madame Delaunay? Pray don't refuse me!"

"You are very amiable, Missees Crauker," replied Madame Delaunay, with all the suavity she could muster. "Pauline will make herself a pleasure of going to your *fête champêtre*. For me, I go not out, and I cannot impose upon you my son, who is not of an age to contribute to the amusement of others."

"Oh, we must have Chubby to take care of his niece," said Mrs. Croker, whereat there was a general laugh, and the visitors rose to go.

While Pauline was ringing the bell to warn the vivacious Ffine that she must be in the convenient neighbourhood of the hall door, Jamesina bent her turquoise-coloured eyes on George as he sprang up to open the drawing-room door, and shot therefrom so charming and artless a glance that the young man's inward reflection of "Devilish pretty girl" became intensified into "What a beautiful woman! and not too stand-off either, take my tip for it! It's like my luck to have no eyes for any one but Pauline, and then to be made miserable over it."

He was so full of his grievances, and so ready to resent them when the Crokers were gone, that he said good-bye almost sulkily, and went dejectedly away. Pauline's parting from him in presence of her grandmother was unaffectedly friendly in its manner.

"This is Tuesday," said George to himself, as he spurred the chestnut into its regulation trot. "On Thursday I'll see her at the picnic, and by the Lord Harry, if I don't make her say 'Yes' then, I'll show her I'm not to be fooled any longer. I don't believe she's as much heart as this filly I'm riding. I've never cared a jot for any one else since I saw her first, and I don't suppose I ever will, but that's nothing to her. Upon my honour, I sometimes feel like those people I've read about, who kill their sweethearts first and themselves afterwards. It's one way of making them yours at any rate!"



## CHAPTER VI.

### *PAULINE ENCOUNTERS HER FATE.*

“ Was ever woman in this humour wooed,  
Was ever woman in this humour won ? ”

—SHAKSPERE.

THURSDAY morning, the morning of Mrs. Croker's picnic, was obscured by an Australian mist—one of those dense, low-lying strata of vapour, forerunners of heat or rain. For the inmates of Beau-Séjour the clearing away of these mists was like the lifting up of the gauze curtains through which are dimly seen the garish glories of a transformation scene. First of all the polished masses of orange trees, dotted with white and gold, grew into distinctness in the foreground, as their impalpable covering rolled slowly away; beyond them the line of beach, shining like a band of silver against the violet sea, made a middle distance of light and glitter, and yet farther away, lost in the delicious medley of tints produced by the struggle of the sunbeams with the mist, was a background made up of half-obscured islands and heights and spires that sparkled like topazes wherever they reflected the light.

As Pauline watched this scene from the upper balcony in front of her bedroom window, she felt unreasonably elated. A metaphysically inclined heroine is necessarily a difficult subject to deal with. How chronicle the moods of a mind made happy by the effect of the rose-coloured smoke of an engine scurrying along under a sunset sky, or abandoned to the dreariest speculations at sight of two mongrels in each other's grip?

Where all is conjecture and uncertainty, the impression of the moment must naturally colour the view of the universe at large.



It was the sound of Chubby's aggrieved tone of voice resounding through the house which brought Pauline down from her fanciful heights. She is known as Chubby's champion, and even now would willingly play the part of the little boy who was brought up with a prince, and beaten whenever his royal highness did not know his lessons.

She hears Madame Delaunay say—

“It rests with you, Ernest! You go not without knowing it and without repeating it to me. It is the affair of a quarter of an hour, if you put into it some good-will.”

Chubby's look at Pauline as he carries off his geography book is a signal for help, and Pauline rushes inadvertently to the rescue.

“But, grand'mère, don't you think it's a question of mood as well as of capacity? I know quite well Chubby can learn half a page of Cornwall's at any other time in a quarter of an hour, but just now he can hardly settle to it; and if you will only let him have a whole holiday this once I think he will make up for it to-morrow.”

“If I could answer of the future of my child,” replies madame sadly, “I would conduct him laughing across his infancy. It is in order to soften to him the suffering which is so inevitable in his life that I would learn to him early to dominate himself. It is your defect to you, Pauline, that you would make lie all the world on a bed of roses. It is but the fear of giving to him hurt which prevents you from saying the truth to Monsieur Drafton. Tell to him hardily that you love him not. He will be wounded, he will suffer of it, he will weep, perhaps; but it will be more loyal, more *probe* on your part, than to leave him in a hope which you will never fulfil.”

“Perhaps he won't ask me again, grand'mère. I'm on the defensive as it is, and if he does I shall say I'm very sorry, but simply I can't care for anybody, and I suppose he'll make up his mind to like somebody else in time.”

If Pauline, independently of the indefinable sentiment which she entertained for Sir Francis Segrave, had ever known what it meant to set her heart upon one being to the exclusion of all others, she would have spoken less lightly of George's affection for her. Madame Delaunay had a clearer comprehension of his state of



mind, but madame was prepared on her side to sacrifice every consideration to her one object of preventing Pauline from marrying for the present. She was filled with remorse and misgivings, remorse, because she had trusted to her estimate of George's character, and believed that he would never return at the end of two years—misgivings, because of his tenacity, and her inability to find any reasonable excuse for breaking her word to him that he should plead his own cause at the end of the probationary epoch. Her only safeguard seemed to lie in Pauline's evident indifference to her lover, and madame warily abstained from putting obstacles in the way of either, lest opposition should warm Pauline's apathy into a belief that she too was in love.

That, just now, no one ranked before Chubby in Pauline's heart, would have been evident to any one who had seen her speak to the little boy, as he sat on the fender-stool in the drawing-room with the open lesson-book on his knees.

"See, darling! I'm going to practise," opening the grand piano as she spoke, "and I shan't leave off till you know your lesson. So we shall both be at work—and if you like Bergerette shall learn it too, and I'll see which of you knows it best."

Bergerette was a shepherdess of Sèvres porcelain, who for many years had been on the point of yielding to the entreaties of a china shepherd on the other side of the clock called Berger. Berger's fixed expression of sentimental yearning was so appealing, that any but a shepherdess with a heart of adamant or of porcelain would have made him happy centuries ago. On Chubby's behoof Pauline had animated every object in her grandmother's drawing-room, full of quaint relics that madame looked upon as links in the chain which bound her to bygone days. The bulky Chinese vases had been brought from China by her great-uncle, the Jesuit, in the days when the Flowery Land was still a dark and mysterious region. Under Pauline's influence the quaint little figures, stepping on air, woke to life in the night-time; Chubby imagined them picking the stiff roses within their reach, and pelting Berger and Bergerette therewith. The three graces in alabaster,



holding aloft the gilt and white clock on the mantelpiece, rolled it about the room and tripped daintily over it like acrobats on a ball, and the carvings on the old oak cabinet half detached themselves like eels in a basket and twisted their necks about as they looked on. It was a room fitted to give birth to such dreams—sheeted with mirrors, yet dark in tone—the only modern articles of furniture the piano, and an ottoman ingeniously contrived for forcing visitors to sit with their backs towards each other.

Twenty minutes elapse.

"See if Bergerette knows it yet!" gasps Chubby, heated and triumphant, releasing his ears from the forefingers which have been plugging them, and ceasing the sing-song chant in which he has been intoning the exports and imports of Cape Town.

Pauline looks over his shoulder just long enough to enable her to lay hold of the first four or five lines, and taking Bergerette gravely from its post by his side, holds the image up before her mouth and mumbles, "Wool, the most important; hides and skins, copper ore, ostrich feathers, ivory, wine. Population"—

"Please, I don't know any more!"

"For shame, Bergerette! Very badly done, miss! Learn it again. Do you think you have raced her, Chubby?"

For all reply Chubby thrusts the book into Pauline's hands, and, nervously pulling at his blouse, rushes through his lesson at break-neck speed; then in the dread lest he should forget it scampers to the breakfast room and presents it to his mother, falling into the "hands-behind-back" attitude as naturally as a soldier presents arms at sight of his superior. Pauline meanwhile stands breathlessly by, unconsciously forming inarticulate syllables in imitation of his. How happy they both are when Cornwall is put by in the congenial vicinity of Ollendorff and Colenso, and there is nothing more formidable than breakfast to be got through before they set out together for the Crokers'.

George in the meantime is dressing at his hotel in all the purposeless haste of an irritated, half-desperate man. There has been a loo-party in one of the rooms of the Australian Club, and George has been gambling



recklessly and losing heavily. Three or four hours of disturbed sleep have not sufficed to whiten the rims round his eyes, or to smooth away the furrows which seem to have dug themselves into his forehead during the night. He is a gambler from choice and from habit, but he lacks the cool self-possession of the instinctive and professional gambler. It chafes him to lose, and his eyes and fingers betray his mortification. It had been nearly daylight when his party broke up. The first faint rays of morning were struggling into the gas-lit room. Outside a pure soft light was creeping up from the east. George had thrown open the window as his companions were leaving the room. A deep line of scarlet ran the round of the horizon edged with golden flakes, cradled in misty clouds of grey. Inside the lights in the burners seemed to pale with shame before the great glory of the father of all light. The half burnt cigars smouldered where they lay. Heaps of cards lay scattered in confusion on the untidy table. There were splashes of brandy and water and cigar ashes all over it. George did not smoke, and the cigar fumes made him ill. Standing by the open window, and somehow connecting Pauline with the pure breeze without, he thought bitterly of his unfortunate lot. "They say, 'unlucky with cards, and lucky with a wife,'" he said to himself, "but, by God, it seems I'm to have no show for either!"

It did not restore his equanimity to find on returning to the hotel a letter on his bedroom mantelpiece addressed to him in Mr. Carp's distorted handwriting. He turned the letter over and over in his hands, and looked curiously at the post-mark on the commercial envelope before opening it. The first part alluded only to station improvements. It was the last break which set George pondering uneasily on its import.

"I hear you have a love affair in hand," wrote Mr. Carp. "It's no business of mine who you marry, but I'd have you remember, 'When poverty knocks at the door, love flies out at the window.' A word to the wise is sufficient."

Mr. Carp's orthography, it will be seen, was in harmony with his caligraphy.

"What the devil does he mean?" thinks George,



feeling as if some new stroke of fate were threatening him. "I wish I had the old beast here at this very minute. I'd make him speak plain English, or I'd punch his head for him if he didn't. Does he suppose I'm going to slave for him all the best years of my life for nothing but his measly screw? Or does the brute want to marry again? He'd better try it on, that's all. I'll make it hot for him if he does."

Such a supposition was enough to put George into a cold perspiration. Though it must be admitted that his sentiments towards his uncle were hardly of a filial description, he had nevertheless learned to regard himself as Mr. Carp's adopted son, and unwittingly he had begun to reckon upon being some day master of a fortune which would make him a rich man for life. His friends were never backward in encouraging this idea, which, to tell the truth, did not require much fostering to become a permanent notion in George's mind.

"I'd like to be in your shoes, old fellow!" they were wont to say jocularly. "You'll show them the way when the old man goes on the shelf," to which graceful badinage George, half under protest, grinned assent, and then fell to calculating on the possible length of his uncle's days.

It so happened, then, that on this particular Thursday morning, while Pauline and Chubby were blithely walking to the general meeting-place, George was riding moodily along, telling himself over and over again that he could bear this torture of suspense no longer. It is not to be wondered at that an anthropomorphic conception of a deity should have given rise to the idea that our prayers are sometimes granted more in wrath than in mercy. The ardently desired object is in our possession at last, and we are more miserable than we were before.

If George had prayed for the fulfilment of his wish, his prayer would have been a fierce one, at the best. If he could have made Pauline marry him by force, he would have used force without scruple. He did not ask himself whether his companionship would be all-sufficient for her happiness, nor even concern himself much as to whether he could make her love him; only



let him get her to himself, to have and to hold her! The rest would come in time. Wives were bound to love their husbands, and there was no reason why his wife should be an exception to the rule.

It was almost a fresh grievance, on arriving at the Crokers', to see Pauline looking so radiantly young and happy. She has inherited from her grandmother that particular sort of French mouth whose corners, slightly turned down, have a half suggestion of mockery in their curves, and the sailor jacket she wears over her buff print gives her the air of the most charming rebel imaginable.

George finds himself in the midst of all the preparatory bustle of starting. The beautiful terraces in front of the house are covered with excursionists, and grooms and coachmen are standing about at horses' heads, as Mr. Drafton dismounts, and, with his left arm through the bridle of his chestnut, shakes hands with Mrs. Croker and bows to a pink and white nymph behind the marble balustrade whom he recognises as the artless Jamesina. Broad-brimmed hats are wagging together in confidential intercourse respecting the fashions and the Prince's visit, and two or three very young men are apparently admiring their nether extremities and pondering on the possibility of wearing leggings oftener.

Mrs. Croker, aided by Miss Gerofly (whose infant Moses in Berlin wool work has given her a just title to celebrity), is distributing her guests among the different vehicles with an observance of sets of which a Brahmin might have been proud. Miss Gerofly, having made up her mind that the age we assign ourselves is a matter dependent on our own choice, and supposing that, as the world is so often willing to take us at our own value, it will be just as ready to take us at our own age, has many years ago decided that she will never pass the limit of five-and-twenty; by means of which ingenious process of reasoning she may be said to enjoy a season of perennial youth.

"And so that's Mr. Drafton, my dear?" she says to Pauline, with a little giggle of anticipation. "How he *did* look at you, to be sure! A little flirtation, eh? Now I really don't mean to flirt if I can help it, but men are such funny creatures, aren't they. They always begin when you're quite off your guard, don't they?"



While Pauline is trying to evolve the meaning of this darkly ambiguous admission, the signal is given for a start. Buggies and waggonettes rattle in solemn order to the front; an antiquated drag which, from its appearance, might have done duty in its day as a circus van or an itinerant artist's abode, brings up the rear—a very patriarch of vehicles; and last on the list, like a palpable “happy thought” tacked on to the caravan, appears a spring cart watched over by a toothless gardener, his infirmity counting for something in his promotion to the commissariat department.

The separate individualities of the community shall remain in oblivion. Ordinary people of the upper middle class sort are very much like each other in all parts of the world. If, typically speaking, you could roll up and blend a few dozen persons in every township in Australia, then cut them up into separate fragments of humanity, male and female, and carry on this process simultaneously, you would be astonished to find how much each aggregate mass resembled the other before the work of subdividing was begun.

Miss Gerofly, in the back seat of a buggy, is rendered happy for her little hour by finding that the whole of an unfledged middy has been apportioned to her. She is probably off her guard, for the middy looks sufficiently scared to warrant the supposition that she has consented to lay aside her defensive weapons in his behalf.

Pauline and Chubby are in the drag, with a promiscuous assortment of misses and naval men, over whom an elderly matron on the box is supposed to keep an Argus-like watch. They both will hold in lifelong remembrance the appearance of the cavalcade of riders and drivers speeding over the long undulating road that stretches away for miles out of Sydney, out along the sea-coast, out into the lanes, where the small cottages look like a tangle of creepers, out until the red dust is exchanged for the cleanly sand, out still farther until it is brought to a sudden stop by a rocky declivity near the sea.

George, trotting behind, still mutely recording his miseries and his desires, will remember all this too. Though they are taking no mental photograph of it, this scene will nevertheless be burnt into their brains.



Every one knows that the primary object of a picnic is to eat. Moss-covered rocks and silvery spray, long cool shadows and waving, murmuring branches—all these are accessories. They form a poetical background to cold turkey, lobster-salad, mayonnaise, strawberries and cream, iced champagne, and other delicacies of the kind which Mrs. Croker had provided. Like Todgers, she could do it when she chose, and she *had* chosen—as all who were at the picnic will testify. But even the unctuous comforts of *paté de fois gras* do not bring a spark of consolation to George. He is like a man in a baffling dream. Pauline is there, but she always seems to elude him. He turns to speak to her, and it is Jamesina who says in her plaintive little monotone—

“Will you give me some claret-cup, Mr. Drafton? and do put a large lump of ice into it, please!”

The day wears on. Even at a picnic one must leave off eating at last. Parties of twos and threes are wandering about, giving vent to little shrieks of discovery, the threes being for the most part unhappy units, who hang on like barnacles to the discomfiture of the twos to whom they have attached themselves.

Miss Gerofly has reduced her middy to a limp condition—he wears a chronic smile expressive of great feebleness—and Mrs. Croker has found herself so wonderfully interested by Pauline that she cannot let the “dear motherless girl” leave her side. Mrs. Croker has at least enough perception to interpret the wistful look in the brown eyes turned seaward, and to divine that Pauline is longing to get away where the wide-spreading sea is heaving in a sort of lazy contentment under the warm sun, but Mrs. Croker has a daughter to consider, and Jamesina has said pointedly at starting—

“You know, ma, the day will be spoilt, as far as I’m concerned, if I’m expected to look after Pauline Vyner. Do keep her by you, please, and I’ll see to all the others.”

And if, as Talleyrand said, “Speech were given to us that we might hide our thoughts,” Miss Jamesina could not have covered up more artfully the injunction to her mother to keep Pauline in the background.



Mrs. Croker understood and reassured her daughter. "I'm sure, my dear child, you will neglect nobody. Leave Miss Vyner to me! The poor motherless girl shall not feel herself neglected, you may rely upon it."

So Miss Croker has the field all to herself, and by the time she has begun to despair of adding George to the list of her hundred and one admirers it is time to make a move homewards. Then scouts are despatched in search of truant explorers, and nosebags are ruthlessly torn away from the fumbling heads of munching horses.

Chubby has enjoyed his day after his own fashion. He has measured the circumference of the trees, and run backwards and forwards between Pauline and the sea-shore with cornelians and shells. And now he is standing in his soiled blouse, intently watching Mrs. Croker's coachman as he backs a powerful horse with professional rapidity into a four-wheeled double-seated buggy.

"I say, young feller," says the coachman, spitting out a straw, and addressing Chubby with all the usual colonial freedom of speech, "will you be so very obligin' as to set in this 'ere seat and 'old on to them reins, while I go and see if all the victuals is packed?"—here he winks with great meaning. "Clarence 'ull stand right enough, only don't you let 'im work 'is 'ead about, there's a good chap!"

Chubby is as pleased as a pascal lamb might be on finding itself in a prominent position. The coachman hoists him up into the high seat, puts the reins into his childish fingers, and leaves him smiling and triumphant.

After a time Clarence begins to rub his ears against the shafts as if the flies were teasing him. Chubby thinks this is rather a funny operation, and the reins slip through his fat hands. Clarence rubs the side of his head harder still, and the buggy gives a little jerk sideways. Chubby would like it better if Clarence would stand still. "Wo, Clarence!" he says encouragingly; "be a good horse!" but Clarence is shorting and throwing back his head, and does not heed the appeal. Chubby can see that his blinkers are nearly off, and can catch a glimpse of the red-white of a startled and furious eye. Then it is that a nervous little voice is heard calling despairingly, "Oh, take me out! please take me out! I don't like it! Oh! somebody come, please! Pauline! oh!"——



Pauline, released for the first time that day from Mrs. Croker's hampering attentions, finds herself in the centre of a little group playing at tinker and tailor with grass stalks. It is George who puts the stalk into her hands when it comes to her turn to take it. She begins with due gravity at the eleventh seed, "Tinker, tailor, soldier,"—and then her voice suddenly dies away, the blood flies from her lips, and she is racing forward in a dream-like agony of terror before any one can imagine what has happened. She sees Chubby with dilated eyes and white face holding on to the splashboard of the buggy at the mercy of a furious horse, and she has an eternity of time in which to realise that her darling is in fearful peril, and that it is all true, and that the sort of horrible catastrophe she has sometimes dimly imagined in a nightmare has come upon her at last. She sees that the horse is mad with terror, and feels instinctively that in another second he will dash off with the buggy over the cliff in front of him. Her arms are thrown wildly out to stop him, but before she can sacrifice herself George is in front of her.

"Stand back, Pauline!" he shouts, in hoarse tones of command, pushing her away with his hand as he rushes onwards to the buggy. He is just and only just in time. With one plunge forward, which sets the buggy rocking like a cradle, Clarence, with head between his knees, is off. Two vigorous, muscular hands seize his reins on either side, and then the unequal fight begins. A horse is stronger than a man, every one will admit, but few people know what a horse's strength really is. As this one rears up in the air, he swings George off the ground, and throws Chubby back into the recesses of the buggy, where he stays rigidly clinging with all his might to the seat. "Hold on, my boy, but don't jump out!" said George, almost out of breath, as Clarence bestows a kick on the splashboard which splinters it into fragments. It all happens in so short a time that George has to fight his battle single-handed. Faint screams are heard issuing from the group of girls. The two or three young men who are with them hang back. "He'll be killed if he doesn't look out," they say, as the horse with another desperate bound almost throws George down at his feet, and drives



one of the shafts into his side with a force that overspreads his face with a sickly pallor.

"Oh, let Chubby jump into my arms, for heaven's sake, Mr. Drafton, I implore you!—let Chubby jump, and then leave him!"

This from Pauline frantically, who would give her soul to be in Chubby's place, provided only he might be in hers. It is evident that George cannot hold out much longer. The young men make a move. The coachman is seen puffing up the incline; but George has conquered! He relinquishes a manageable animal to the coachman, he sees Pauline burst into tears as Chubby jumps out safe and sound into her arms, and then a mist hides the buggy and the landscape from his eyes, and he hears a voice which seems miles away saying in muffled tones, "He's fainted, by Jove! Help me to carry him under that tree!"

When George next opens his eyes he sees portions of a blue sky overhead through a whole network of dark green leaves. He finds that his coat and waistcoat are off, the blood on his shirt is still wet, and as he raises himself on his hands a sudden spasm in the side almost takes away his senses again. A ship's doctor is kneeling close to him with a tumbler of water and a wet handkerchief in his hand.

"Feel better, old fellow? Soon get you on your legs again! Don't stir for a minute or two yet."

"My side," says George, with a little groan; "I've a beastly pain in my side."

"Oh! I know what's the matter with your side. Two of your ribs are broken, that's all; but we'll soon put that little matter right. Well, if you will sit up, lean your back against the tree. What! Miss Vyner wants to speak to you; is that it? All right. Yes, I'll go and see after your whip."

The little crowd that had gathered round George has distanced itself, and Pauline is free to speak to him alone. A thousand Mrs. Crokers could not keep her from his side now. She stands before him with trembling lips and moist eyes under the shade of the overhanging branches. She cannot control her voice just yet. It sounds thick and shaky even to her own hearing as she tries incoherently to tell him what she



feels. "Are you much hurt, Mr. Drafton?" kneeling down on the grass before him as she speaks. "What can I say? What can I do? I would give my life if it would be of any use to you."

She is so much in earnest that she cannot force back the tears from her eyes, though she essays to rub them impatiently away. George speaks in gasps. A frenzied hope that here is his chance come at last, the chance he has been longing for, struggling after, dreaming about so unceasingly, takes hold of his soul. He will never be master of the position again. He sits upright, and forgets that he has even a scratch.

"It's not your life, Pauline—you know that well—it's not your life I want, darling—it's your love. Oh, do give it me!" he pleads, and a fresh blood-stain spreads itself over his white shirt, a mute, most powerful aid to his entreaty. "To get your love I'd have every bone in my body broken, let alone a rib—and there's God's truth for you! Say yes. Don't refuse me, Pauline, my love! You know whether I love you or not!"

What can Pauline say in reply? The sacrifice of her being seems a trifle in comparison with the good which she has gained. Would the world ever have been the same again? Would she have lived with the echo of Chubby's last helpless cry for help ringing through all the years to come in her ears? Would she have gone to bed, and dressed herself in the morning, and eaten and drunk as usual, after Chubby had been brought back to his mother at night, his round limbs crooked and distorted, a bruised, bloody, shapeless piece of flesh, in the place of a warm, life-loving child, in such enjoyment of his being that it made one feel healthy and happy to watch him running about in the sunshine? Would she have gone mad with the one haunting idea that it was all her own fault; that it was she who had wearied her grandmother with her importunities that Chubby might come to the picnic, that it was she who had neglected to watch over the little boy while the horses were standing about? She would have hungered for the feel of Chubby's arms round her neck until her death—and after death?—Poor Pauline! poor any one who cannot help loving so brittle a thing as a human life!



Her emotion has quite unnerved her. She replies almost hysterically, "I said I would give you my life if you wanted it. I meant it. You shall have it. I should like to spend it all in proving my gratitude!"

There is no word of love in her answer, but George is content. The flush of joy which chases away the sickly colour from his cheeks quite transforms his face for the instant.

"Darling, give me your hand. Would you kiss me if we were alone? Bother all those people! What are the fools staring at, I should like to know? Never mind them. Thank God, I'm at peace at last. Don't go yet. Why do you get up?" for Pauline sees Chubby moving from his seat a few yards off, and she cannot bear to have him away from her now.

The ship's doctor is a man of the world. He has been out of sight for a discreetly long time during the search for the whip, and now he returns to the tree and produces it as if he had only just found it.

"I dropped across it a minute ago," he declares, in the calmest voice imaginable. "Miss Vyner, I hope you've been telling Mr. Drafton to rest on his laurels for the present. He won't be in cue for horsebreaking for some weeks to come; and by-the-by, Drafton, you'd better let me ride your nag home. I'm a crack rider for a sailor; never want my feet tied together, you know. You shall have my place in the sociable, and the ladies will make it soft for you among them."

He helps George on to his feet, and skilfully works him into his vest and coat. Pauline, Chubby, Miss Gerofly with her capture in tow, Mrs. Croker and George, are in the sociable.

"Well, I'm sure," says Mrs. Croker, settling herself back with an air of angelic forbearance in her seat next to George, "you've saved me from an attack of nerves, Mr. Drafton; I can assure you, you have! If Master Delaunay had gone over the cliff, Miss Vyner, I really believe I should have been laid on a bed of sickness. I suppose you couldn't possibly have saved the buggy, Mr. Drafton, could you?"—complainingly—"It's quite spoilt, I'm sure. I don't know what William can have been thinking of to trust it to a child!"



Despite the pain and the weariness, the drive is all too short for George. His uncle, his losses, his broken ribs—all are forgotten. He is sitting by the side of his betrothed, and the tantalising tormenting delight he has felt in her presence is gone. The delight is intensified, but the torment has fled. She belongs to him now. He may look his fill. She has no right to protest. He meets her pleading, grateful eyes, and gives a restless little sigh as she turns them away.

Out over the sea the clouds are turning from burnished copper colour to greeny gold, and the inky-hued evergreens are throwing rosy shadows across the path. All this glory has faded out of the sky by the time Sydney is reached, and there is only a pale white light in the distance, throwing into distinctness all objects seen against it as sharply as if they were cut like cameos upon stone. The sociable comes to a halt first at George's hotel.

"Till to-morrow, then!" he says eagerly to Pauline, as he moves towards the door. He had been rather subdued than demonstrative before all these curious eyes, but he cannot refrain from a long pressure of Pauline's hand as he bids her good-bye, nor keep the lover-like expression from his eyes as he watches the sociable drive away.

Broken ribs, you see, are nothing when a heart-sore has been healed. George exulted in his aches and pains because they reminded him how it was that he came to be so happy.



## CHAPTER VII.

### PAULINE IS INFLEXIBLE.

"What will not woman, gentle woman, dare,  
When strong affection stirs her spirit up."

—SOUTHEY.

IT was Pauline's habit to read to her grandmother at breakfast-time such scraps from the *Sydney Morning Herald* as Madame Delaunay might care to hear. In those days there was no direct telegraphic communication, and on the arrival of each mail madame's interest in all the details of Continental news was keen. She was always a Frenchwoman at heart.

Chubby's knowledge of French dynasties was profound, as compared with his certainty respecting colonial governors; and Pauline would have found it easier to affix a date regarding the arrangement of departments in France, than one which would have reference to the separation of New South Wales from Victoria. On the morning after the picnic the trio at Beau-Séjour was seated at the breakfast table as peaceably as if no domestic revolution had been brought about the day before. Madame, somehow, does not care about the items of home news this morning, and it is only when Chubby, who has a plan all his own for finding out whether the population of Sydney gains or loses during the year, reads aloud the name of Sir Francis Segrave in the list of passengers by the outgoing mail, that Pauline gives a little start.

"It can make no difference to me now," she reflects, "whether he goes or stays; and it is simply inexcusable to be glad that Jamesina should not have him. And yet I *am* glad nevertheless. I shall try to put it to myself on the score of my certainty that Jamesina would not have suited him, and that they would both have been miserable."



"Chubby," she says aloud, "will you mind watering my ferns for me this morning? only don't substitute your carrot tops for them. I want to speak to grand'mère all alone."

While Chubby is in all the active enjoyment of drenching himself wholly, and the pots outside partially, Pauline takes up the thread of a discourse which was interrupted by the breakfast bell. Her hair falls in wet waves all over her back, and her eyes are still lustrous from the effect of her morning dip into the sea, but she is ill at ease in her manner, and gathers all the crumbs near her plate into a little round heap as she speaks.

"No, grand'mère! I don't regret it, and you won't make me say that I do either. Everything is changed since yesterday morning. I am changed too, or else it would not have happened. I begin to think now that even if Chubby had not been at the picnic, and Mr. Drafton had not risked his life to save him, it would have come to the same thing in the end. Why need you mind so much?"

She divides her heap of crumbs into a cross, and abstains from looking at her grandmother's face. Madame might have aged by ten years during the night. Her eyes have the worried look of a hunted animal, well driven into a corner, uncertain which way to turn.

"To what good save the one of my children if it is absolutely necessary that I sacrifice the other? Is it that Monsieur Drafton will not listen to me? But I will force him to listen! I will reclaim of his generosity, of his honour, that he gives you yet a little time before you decide yourself."

She speaks vehemently, as in the days when she had tried to reason with Pauline's mother so earnestly, so unavailingly.

For any one who had studied the rounded contour of Pauline's chin, it would have been a revelation to see the determination that was gathering in her face. Soft round chins do not bespeak obstinacy. It is your square set jaw that denotes an inflexible nature.

"If you do anything of the sort, grand'mère, I will go straight to Mr. Drafton and tell him that I am ready to marry him when he chooses. What! you



would have him nearly killed to save your child, and then you would grudge him such a little reward as this. Besides, what does he want after all? To make me happy. He says so, and I believe him. If our tastes aren't quite the same, I can adapt myself to his. It will be quite enough to think of him holding back that mad brute of the Crokers', after his bones were broken, to make me care for him as long as I live!"

"Ta-ta-ta!" rejoins her grandmother; "the emotion of an instant fills not up a life. Would you then espouse all the sailors in the *Birkenhead* of which you would read to me the other day? You inspire me with a fear that you have not been contented, my child. Is it so?"

"I don't know," answers the girl slowly. "Everything here is so smooth. My day is all mapped out for me from the morning. Chubby's music lesson, visits to make with you, reading, practising, pleasures very often!—no crosses excepting Chubby's Ollendorff and having my dresses tried on by Miss Straitlace. I might have all the vices under the sun in embryo—they haven't a chance of showing themselves here."

"Do you feel then the germs of them?"

"Yes; even now, sometimes when I am idle, I find my head is full of vague desires, aspirations after I know not what. If I try to reduce them to something explicit, they cannot be explained. If I ask myself after all what I want—to be able to travel, or write a book, or do something great, none of these seem to answer exactly to what I mean. Then I think it must be a sort of wild wish to fathom the unknown, and I build castles in the air higher than the tower of Babel, to try and reach the clouds. At last I give it all up, and think that my nature is crooked, or that human nature is bad altogether, and when people are happy, they must try and interfere with their own happiness, because it is against the order of creation, or evolution, or whatever it may be, that they should ever be quite contented."

Madame Delaunay makes no comment. In the days when similar perplexities had been fermenting in her young brain, she had been wont to pour them all out to her husband the Deputy. Then the man of letters would listen to his little wife with a half-smile and



the fullest possible comprehension of her every thought. He could not tell her, to be sure, why there is a "worm in every bud," but the music of his words never failed to have its effect upon her. He knew how to find congenial work for her—the surest possible antidote to brain worry—and whatever she might think of existence in the mass, she owed to him that existence in her own case was so happy. All this had not enabled her to secure a peaceful career for her daughter; but Rosalie had been wayward from the cradle. Now that Rosalie was dead, and Henri Delaunay was dead, it was madame's dream to keep her granddaughter with her, or only to relinquish her to a man who might resemble her grandfather. She knew too well the requirements of Pauline's nature to delude herself with the idea that the girl could ever be happy as George's wife. She said nothing, but went upstairs and opened an old hair trunk, another of her early relics, taking therefrom a tin box which she unlocked with trembling fingers. Every one nearly has some little treasure of the sort. Locks of hair—faded likenesses, withered flowers—they mock us by changing so little when we are changed so much. How valueless they are, and yet how we cling to them! In each one is lodged an emotion which is born again in our hearts when we see them.

Madame drew out of her box a daguerrotype in an embossed case and opened it, adjusted before her eyes a pair of old-fashioned spectacles, and attentively regarded the portrait. Save for the old-fashioned dress of twenty years back, drawn like a honeycomb in at the waist, and the long dark curls tied back into their place by a piece of ribbon round the head, the picture might almost have been taken for Pauline herself. The head was a little thrown back, and the eyes looked arch defiance at the gazer—a charming, petulant face that seemed to breathe a determination to bend the world to its liking. "Pauvre ange!" said madame under her breath, caressing the unheeding portrait with wistful eyes; she seemed to have summoned new resolution when she shut the case and put her treasure by. She heard Pauline singing in the garden below, and met her near the verandah steps laden



with flowers—great bunches of late cloth-of-gold roses, long quivering sprays of feathery grass, sprigs of orange-blossom scenting the air around them, trailing twisted masses of scarlet passion-flower, all scattered in luxurious profusion in her upheld skirt. All the vases in the house were ranged on the verandah floor, and Pauline seats herself on the top step to fill them with her flowers. She makes believe to be so absorbed in her occupation as hardly to heed her grandmother's presence, and hums to herself, "*A Sainte Blaise.*" As she sticks her last flexible stalk of silvery grass into a long vase of bronze carried on the back of a brazen Savoyard there is a noise of wheels near the front gate, and Pauline, jumping up, sees the top of a hansom. "And this means Mr. Drafton," she thinks; "and I am really engaged to him; and my hair is all down, and in a tangle and wet, and I am not fit to be seen!"

So when George, driving up the pebbly path, looks out of his hansom in search of Pauline, he only sees a cataract of shiny hair and the back of a flying figure, but he sees Madame Delaunay erect in her seat, and in presence of the woman whose child he had saved he feels in the presence of an enemy. There is nothing inimical, however, in Madame Delaunay's manner of greeting him, as he moves laboriously and stiffly out of the hansom. George is naturally as elastic as a well-knit frame of some eight-and-twenty years will allow him to be. He vaults a fence while others are looking for a slip panel. At school his nickname was 'Possum, because he might almost have competed with an opossum in a race up a gum-tree. It would disarm a whole host of foes to see him seat himself gingerly, with the bearing of an old man of eighty, in the low chair madame pushes forward for him while he is dismissing the cabman to the front gate to wait for him.

"Thank you, madam," says George, with his hand to his side. "I've no business to be out of my bed this morning, I tell you! Dr. Conelly—the fellow who looked after me yesterday, you know—he set my ribs for me last night, and he'd give me a jolly good talking to if he knew I was on the move so soon."

"But why so much temerity, Monsieur Shorge? There was but to write two words. I ignore not that I owe



to you the life of my son. Yourself, you keep yet the memory of your mother. Therefore you may be able to conceive in part the nature of my debt towards you."

"Oh! that's nothing to make a fuss about. It was a devilish lucky thing that I was by at the time—that's all. Why, a horse'll go fair mad with his blinkers off, sometimes, and you might drive him with a silk thread when they're on. If Mr. Croker doesn't sack his coachman for it, he ought to, in my opinion. I hope Miss—hem—hem—I hope your granddaughter—I hope Pauline is none the worse for her fright to-day."

George has thrown down the gauntlet, and madame will not hesitate to take it up. She looks fearfully round to see that the coast is clear, and prepares for a passage-at-arms, feeling that the conflict has come, determined to fight with all her strength for a reprieve. She is more dignified than declamatory, but when she feels intensely she cannot refrain from a little gesticulatory action.

"Monsieur Shorge," she says, with outstretched hands, as if in appeal to his pity, "you see before you a mother so grateful on the one side, and so unhappy on the other, that you will compassionate her, is it not? You will vex not yourself when she supplicates you to have patience with her for a little instant?—say then, Monsieur Shorge!"

"Say anything you like, madam!" answers George, tapping his foot on the verandah floor nervously. "I'm bound to listen; but I warn you beforehand if it's anything to do with *Pauline*,"—this time he brings out the name with emphasis—"she engaged herself to me of her own free will yesterday, and she'll stick to her bargain, I can answer for it. I'll give her no reason to regret it either, I can promise you that."

"But I believe you, Monsieur Shorge; you love my grandchild sincerely. Another in my place would cede her to you on the instant. I, who know her better, who know her more well even than she of herself knows herself, I say to you, Monsieur Shorge, she is not for you. You are young, you are honourable, it may be that you will be rich—you have done for me that which I can never repay—but she is not for you! If I can prevent her of marrying you, I will do it. She"——

"And about the two years' time?" interrupts George



hotly; "are you going to back out of your own words? Didn't I keep to the terms of the agreement? Did I come near the place, or write a line, or send half a message even? If I haven't the luck to please you, so much the worse for me. Thank goodness, Miss Pauline's of another opinion; and I think she's about the only person to be consulted in the matter!"

He is so discomfited that his eyes have quite a strained look as he puckers his forehead into its usual three horizontal lines. Madame had forgotten the two years for the moment. She has to consider anxiously before she again speaks.

"It is true—it is true; but reflect a moment, Monsieur Shorge! You come here to make your addresses to a young girl ignorant of the world. We will pass by that, however. Will you say that I did not give you free field, what I call *champ libre*, to make to her your court? Still would I give it you. All that I ask, that I pray of you, it is that you would give her yet some time. Continue to see her. Do that she gives you her heart of her own free will, but, *de grace*, take it not by assault. Liberate her of her word. Would you then take what is accorded you in a moment of enthusiasm—of pity?"

The stabs in George's side seem to have redoubled since Madame Delaunay began to speak to him. He hates this woman who is trying to turn his new-born joy into bitterness. He does not believe in her promises; or is Pauline false and cruel, too, and is this a pre-arranged comedy between them? Is Pauline hiding while her grandmother gives utterance to words that she is too cowardly to come forward and speak with her own lips? Such a thought is so unbearable that George starts up in search of her.

"Where is Miss Vyner herself, madam? Have you locked her up on purpose that I shouldn't see her? Curse this pain; I believe I've broken the setting. I'll take no word for it but her own. God knows I've cared for her long enough without being strung on any longer. Is it she who wants me to dilly-dally for another two years, or does she want to throw me over altogether?"

"No indeed, she doesn't, Mr. Drafton; and please what is the matter, and why are you stumbling about



over my unfortunate azaleas," says Pauline, coming on to the scene, with skin soft and fresh as an unsunned peach. "Have I arrived just in time to prevent you from killing grandma, or grandma you? Sit down again at once, and report upon your ribs!"

Half laughingly, half tenderly, she pushes him down into the low chair and stands in her favourite attitude, her arms leaning on the back of her grandmother's chair.

"Mon enfant"——

"Excuse me, madam! Just listen, Pauline"——

"Oh, if you both speak at once," she laughs, "what am I to say? It is quite embarrassing enough to be appealed to as umpire as it is. But, Mr. Drafton, you interrupted grand'mère! Your ribs are clamorous, I am afraid! Yes, grand'mère," she adds, stroking Madame Delaunay's head tenderly from her post behind her chair, "what were you going to say?"

"My child, it is difficult to speak in such a case. It goes of my life now. Here is what I would say to you. Monsieur Shorge comes this morning, it is evident, to affirm his title to your hand. He is right to do it. You did make him your promise, yesterday, the afternoon, when he came from saving the little Ernest before your eyes. But, Pauline, there is not so long since yesterday morning. It was then another history you were recounting; was it not so? Monsieur Shorge will be reasonable!"——there are tears in her voice as she turns her appealing eyes towards the young man opposite. "Listen, my children: I desire your happiness—to you both, believe me! but I have lived so much—I have so much suffered when it had to do with the mother of Pauline. Now I would say to you: Do not affiancé yourself the one to the other. I will not tear you from him. Let him come when he wills! But that he may give you some time! It is all my prayer! Some time—only"——

She holds out a withered hand to clasp the young hand which is fondling her head. George's eyes dart uneasy glances from beneath his creased forehead.

"Madam's had her say, and I've heard it out, Pauline," he breaks out vehemently. "Now, for the Lord's sake, let me have mine! These half-and-half measures are killing me; I can't stand them any longer. I couldn't



at least, excepting that I know you'll be as good as your word. I don't care what name you call it—gratitude, love, anything you like—you promised me yesterday you'd be my wife, and I know you wouldn't tell me a lie!”

The love in his eyes is almost a threatening love, and Pauline, with her hand in her grandmother's and her heart beating loudly, painfully, begins her hesitating reply. Just at this moment a little boy runs past the verandah, with the merry meaningless noise of children, who call out because they are happy and the world is good to be in on a summer's morning.

Madame Delaunay feels Pauline loosening the grasp of her hand, and makes a despairing clutch at it, as if by holding her bodily she could hold her spiritually too. The time may yet come when the girl, sick at heart, will cry out for the protecting shelter of the arms she would escape from now. Every word that she says falls on madame's ears like a discordant note that carries pain to the brain, for Pauline can speak with a determination which would have excited in the Middle Ages a strong desire on the part of her antagonists to lead her off to the stake.

She stands erect by her grandmother's chair, and the excitement of the moment spreads over her creamy skin that rare flush of colour which only comes when the blood runs quickly through her veins.

“You know what I said to you this morning, grand'mère, when you spoke to me about Mr. Drafton at breakfast-time,”—her voice has a hard ring in it, foreign to its nature. “You treat me as if I were still a child, and as if I could not possibly know my own mind. It is quite true that I made Mr. Drafton a promise yesterday, and that I mean to keep it. Do not move, please, Mr. Drafton. Grandma does not make all these objections as a bad compliment to you. Now that the matter is settled, she will not trouble you any more about it, you will see—— Will you, grand'mère?”

The coaxing intonation of the last three words is apparently without effect. Madame Delaunay listens like a criminal, with bowed head—then when the sentence is passed she rises with a stony expression, as of one stunned by a sudden blow, and moves without undue haste to the house.



"Mon Dieu! madame! Madame se trouve mal?" says Fifine, volubly sympathetic, on meeting her mistress in the hall.

"Non, non! Ce n'est rien. Laisse-moi, ma fille." The reply exhausts her last effort at self-control, and she feels her way almost unconsciously to her room. It is not the first time that she has closed the door to do battle with such a despair as those only can feel who have nowhere to turn.

Pauline's impulse to run after her grandmother is checked by George. He installs himself on the couch against the wall of the house, and calls Pauline to his side.

"Come and sit by me," he entreats. "I feel quite ill with all this fuss." Then as she slowly advances towards him, he puts out his arm and encircles her waist. She is not prepared for this sudden assumption of the privileges of an accepted lover, and starts away in nervous discomfiture.

"Oh! but you mustn't, Mr. Drafton! If you're the least bit demonstrative I shall go there," pointing to a chair at the extreme end of the verandah; "and if you can't hear me speak, I'll get the old speaking-trumpet from upstairs, or Chubby shall carry slips of paper between us!"

"I mustn't what?" says George, tightening his hold, and regarding her with fond admiration, unheeding of the threat she has uttered; "mustn't do this, eh?" and before Pauline can protest, he has drawn her face towards his and kissed it passionately.

She struggles from him with her face in a flame. She is so hot and so ashamed—she would like to cry.

"How can you, Mr. Drafton? It's cruel; why do you treat me so? You'll make me dislike you if you do that. You know I'm not a bit used to you yet."

A young girl who has been trembling in the first embrace of her affianced love should not speak as Pauline speaks. She moves from the couch, and seats herself on the low chair that Madame Delaunay has vacated.

George lays back his head among the cushions of the couch and sighs. "I'm an unlucky fellow. I give all, and I get nothing. It's always the way in this world!"

"Then don't give so much," she answered shortly. "You forget! I hardly seem to know you at all well, and it frightens me, I don't know why!"—pausing.



"But I'll talk to you all the morning, if you like—will that do? Only promise one thing: that if I make any conditions you will keep to them. I'm sure you'll grant me the first favour I ask of you; won't you?"

As her voice softens to a tone of sweet persuasion, George's grievance takes wings.

"I'd do anything in this world you asked me! You know I would!"

"Then will you listen to my conditions?"

"Of course I will! Fire away! But don't be too jolly hard on me!"

"Very well! Condition number one: That you will never betray in company or before anybody—no matter who—Chubby even, if he were there, that you look upon me as being engaged to you."

"All right! I'll ask for an introduction every time I see you. Now for number two."

"Well, number two must be that you never by any chance do that again—you know—well, kiss me, I mean"—she brings out the words with effort—"unless you have asked me first whether you may, and I have said yes."

George puts out his hand.

"Well, give me your hand upon it at least," he says, "people always shake hands on a bargain; and since you're so stand-off—see—I'll only kiss your dear pretty fingers. I knew you'd pull them away; and I say, Pauline—there's one thing we must settle this morning. When shall we be fixed up?"

"Fixed up where?" she asks, open-eyed.

"Fixed up in matrimony. You see it's rather a good job for me in more ways than one that I got my ribs smashed yesterday. It'll give me time to get everything settled right off before I go back. I've told you what a queer fish I've got for an uncle. Well, if he knew I was engaged over here he'd be for putting a spoke in my wheel somehow, and there'd be the devil's own row between us. But, once I'm married, all the uncles in the world couldn't unmarry me; so I mean to get the best of him that way."

George does not rightly interpret Pauline's expression, as she listens to his speech with eyes bent on the ground. His love, which makes him mark so keenly every change



of colour in her cheeks, every white tooth that is seen when she parts her red lips in a smile, every ring of hair lifted off her forehead by a passing breeze, does not enable him to understand the shades of feeling that Madame Delaunay would have followed as they arose.

She is so grateful to Mr. Drafton. Her heart had already gone out to him when she confronted her grandmother before him a few moments ago, and unwittingly, for his sake, inflicted a wound that could never quite be healed. She is going to love him as Chubby's saviour deserves to be loved. Is it her own fault that the task does not seem altogether so easy at the outset as she had meant it to be? Or is George himself a little to blame? Why will he persist in talking of his uncle as if it were necessary to outwit him? Pauline does not want to be received upon sufferance into anybody's family. Why will he give constant little checks to the sentiment she is so willing to lavish upon him? Why does it make her afraid instead of happy when he speaks of putting a term to their engagement? She could almost echo her grandmother's cry for time; not for time in which to engage herself—she has plighted her troth already—but for time that she may learn to know him better, that she may use herself to his words, to his ways, that she may feel with him as she would fain feel with the man whom she is to call her husband.

George, on his side, does not want time. He is not curious about the mind of his betrothed, nor desirous that it should reveal itself to him with all its hidden thoughts, its musings, its questionings. He would like to blot out the weeks which must yet drag on before he can call her his very own, can laugh at the notion of being hampered by restrictions in the matter of kissing her when he chooses, can perch her graceful figure on his showiest colt, can have her—intoxicating thought!—sitting by his side during every meal at the lonely station-house at Rubria. The very foretaste of such a happiness as he has snatched at this morning fills him with feverish impatience.

“And you know,” he continues, carrying on his train of thought aloud, “I may say I’ve been as good as two years engaged to you already, for I give you my sacred word of honour, Pauline, that as far as loving any other



woman's concerned, I've not been able to do it. I've tried hard enough, the Lord knows, sometimes, and that's why it made me so mad when your grandmother tried to come between us just now. Only put it to yourself a minute! If I found it such hard lines before, what would it be like now, do you think, eh?"

Pauline accepts the implied compliment with indifference. The allusion to Mr. Carp has mortified her pride.

"If I have the good fortune to please you so much, Mr. Drafton, why should you be afraid of telling your uncle you are engaged?" she asks coldly. "Or will Mr. Carp think you are committing a *mésalliance* by marrying me?"

"Good God!" ejaculates George, "what do you mean? Don't I know that you're out and out too good for me? I don't love you any the less for that. As for Master Josiah Carp, he may take a fit, and I'll tell him so to his face. I've got my screw, and the best part of my father's fortune, and a part share in the station—the one I'm looking after, you know—and I'm pretty well independent of him. I know he's got it into his head that I must marry some girl with money. I suppose he thinks I'll take one of his scrubby stations off his hands if I do—and for all his wealth he's as near as an old miser. But you'll put a set on him, never fear! He'll be civil enough when he sees you; and that's why I want the thing settled offhand before he can come in with any of his dashed advice. Listen here, Pauline. I can see how the land lies with Madame Delaunay, and what with her, and my uncle, and my fears about you, I shall be worried into my grave—for I'm an awful excitable chap; it's my nature. Just you make up your mind this morning to a day for our wedding, and you shan't have a fault to find with me afterwards. There's nothing to delay for—nothing. I don't think you're one of the sort to want to torment a man just for the sake of showing your power. I couldn't love you more than I do; so tell me, my darling."

He bends forward in his eagerness, and draws himself up with a sudden exclamation of pain. Pauline is reminded of his claims. Not twenty-four hours ago she had knelt by his side and protested with sobs that her life is at his disposal. Were all these vehement words a mere effervescent acknowledgment of his heroism,



and she an actress who shed false tears and breathed false oaths by way of recompense? She is frightened of herself, frightened of her own thoughts. She hurries to assent with an alacrity which overwhelms George with surprise and joy.

"I shall have to reconcile grand'mère to it a little, but that won't take long; and I think people always have things to get ready," she replies.

"Let's see," says George, enchanted, "we're in March now—the twentieth, isn't it? Say next month, then, and you fix on the date; but mind it's before the twentieth. If you only knew what a happy fellow you've made me!"

Pauline gives the smallest shiver imaginable.

"Have I? I'm so glad; but I can't bear to think that perhaps grand'mère is unhappy. You mustn't mind it if I leave you to find her."

"Then I'm off," says George. "Dr. What's-his-name's coming at twelve o'clock. Won't you come as far as the gate with me; and won't you give me one kiss yourself before I go? We're quite alone. I won't stir my hands, I promise you. Do, darling, in token that you've forgiven me!"

She walks towards the couch obediently, and bending down, touches his forehead lightly with her lips.

George is fain to be content, sitting back stiffly in the carefully-driven hansom.

"But there's always something—always something," he muses impatiently. "I've got her, and I haven't got her. What the devil is there in it? It'll never be right until we're man and wife!"

Would it be right then? Was George's remedy a safe one? I would not advise another in his place to try the same experiment.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### *A FORETASTE OF FUTURE RELATIONS.*

"There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds."

—TENNYSON.

It has often been said and felt that the jumble of motives which move us to the performance of half our actions cannot be entirely analysed even by ourselves. Exalted self-love, another name for virtue, base self-love, another name for vice, sway differently constituted minds in contrary directions under similar circumstances, but in each case there is always a grain of self-deception in the background. A consistent villain would be as great an anomaly as a consistent saint.

Pauline, struggling against her grandmother's antagonism to George, her own mixed sentiments, in which sometimes a sense of admiring devotion, sometimes an irritating consciousness of a something that repelled her, alternated in her mind, believed surely that gratitude, self-abnegation, a sacred regard for her word, were the causes that determined her acceptance of him. She was the more inclined to resent Madame Delaunay's treatment that she told herself frequently how much she required encouragement and approval instead of coldness and reserve. She did not tell herself at the same time that this very opposition raised its equivalent of resistance in her own nature; that George's pertinacity, his presents, his promises to be and do all that she could desire in their married life, a certain vague idea of independence, a half pleasurable sense of self-imposed martyrdom—all had their share (however small a share it might be) in weighing down the balance of her conflicting feelings. Her declaration to George that she must reconcile her grandmother to the prospect of losing her during the following month was never fulfilled



quite to her own satisfaction. She would have liked to put her arms round madame's neck and tell her, between kisses that were to soften the blow, how she had promised to go away the very next month and make some one else her first object and dearest companion in life. But who that saw madame's stern, sad face and dark eyes, that looked hard because of the held-back tears she would not let fall, could have told her such news in such fashion? Pauline stammered when she announced it, and her grandmother received the announcement with apparent stolidity.

"It is to you to judge," she said; "I have done my possible." And then she turned away, and Pauline, with her heart full to overflowing, found not another word to say.

But perhaps of all the household her Uncle Chubby was the most unwilling to hear reason.

"Why doesn't he marry us all, then?" he asks, after Pauline has vainly tried to work upon his feelings by describing Mr. Drafton's isolated condition—"me and mother and Fifi? We're all used to each other; and I don't like him—he's too new."

"I don't know what you mean by being too new, Chubby, excepting that you don't know him well. And what a silly boy you are: people can't marry more than one wife at a time."

"Can't they?" says Chubby reflectively. "In my book of Arabian Nights there's a man sitting on cushions with twenty or thirty."

"Oh, but that's not in Australia! No—I'll tell you what to do. You must be so good to grand'mère when I'm gone that she has never to hear you your Ollendorff twice, or to look round for her spectacles, or even to say 'Tais toi, Ernest!' when she is reading her book; and after a little time, in which you will have written me a long letter every day, and had one from me too, then you'll come and stay with me. Shan't we be happy together?"

"No."

"No! Why not?"

"Because it won't be at home."

"Yes, it will. It'll be my home, and that is the same as yours."

"No!" insists Chubby; "this is your home. Oh,



please, Pauline, don't marry Mr. Drafton for long! I will do what you say, and I'll water your big pots for you too every day; only if you don't come back soon I won't care for anything one bit."

How overcome such a resistance to belief as Chubby's? Pauline cannot find it in her heart to rob him of his innocent delusion, so Chubby confides to Berger and Bergerette that Pauline has to be married for a little bit, because a man called Mr. Drafton has got rather dull all by himself, but when mother and Chubby are dull (which cannot fail to be on the morrow of Pauline's departure) they will send the postman to her with a letter that minute; then of course she will come back to them, because Mr. Drafton is only a visitor, and not one of the family like they are.

Under such adverse circumstances as these does George carry on his courtship. His ribs and his grievances alike heal themselves, and his chestnut takes the road to Beau-Séjour every day as mechanically as she eats her daily allowance of hay and chumps her regulation handful of oats. Sometimes, too, the chestnut has a companion, for it may be noted that George's highest conceptions of artistic perfection are embodied in the conjunction of a pretty woman and a well-bred horse. In such matters, as he is wont to say of himself, he will "back his judgment against any white man's in Victoria."

"That's a good bit of stuff that you're on," he tells Pauline, as she rides by his side one hot afternoon in the beginning of March; "but then you'd show off any horse, you would! He's half-brother to this mare I'm riding. They were both got by the same sire. He doesn't make half a bad lady's horse, does he? How do you like his trot?"

"Wonderfully well," she replies; "only don't make me talk till I'm quite used to the motion. I'm like those people who can't speak when they're playing the piano, unless they jerk out their words to the beat of the music. But isn't riding a delight altogether?" she continues, rather inconsistently, as her horse swerves on to a piece of greensward by the side of the road and breaks into a hand-gallop over the elastic turf.

These are the ecstatic moments of George's life, these moments during which all dreary misgivings on the



score of want of sympathy and of mutual understanding are merged into his delightful certainty of being the superior, the instructor, the protector. Pauline, in her close-fitting dark-blue habit, mounted on a horse of George's choosing, poising in her hand the little gold-headed whip he has given her, the far-away look in her eyes exchanged for an expression of happy confidence, is Pauline as he would always have her, if, like a defunct Red Indian, he could course by her side over infinite hunting-grounds through eternity.

He tells her something of the sort, clumsily enough, the same day, as they are slowly walking their horses homeward. Pauline looks interested at once.

"I suppose nobody can help associating his idea of future happiness with whatever gratifies him most in the present," she answers, with thoughtful brow. "One can no more imagine a new sort of happiness than a new colour, nor even imagine an eternity of any sort that it does not frighten one to think of. I wish you would tell me, Mr. Drafton, what you think really about a hereafter—I mean as regards yourself."

"Oh! I expect Old Nick'll have a prog at me with his pitchfork one of these days—but I don't know either. I don't think they'll be very rough on me up above, if it's only on account of my mother. She *was* a Christian, I tell you, if ever there was one. But don't you fret, Pauline; I promise you I'll be a reformed character yet before I die. You'll see me going to church with a prayer-book as big as your head; and, I say, in the meantime you'll do the church-going for me, and put in a bit of a prayer for me sometimes. It can't do any harm, and it might do a lot of good; there's no telling."

"I do wish you would speak seriously just for once, Mr. Drafton. I want to know so much what you think. Some people won't even live together who can't make allowance for each other's ideas about things that nobody can prove. Perhaps even you won't have anything to say to me when you know all. Were you joking just now, or did you really mean what you said? Do you believe in your own heart that there's an Old Nick, as you call him, with a pitchfork, and fire, and suffering souls to torment?"



"Why, everybody believes that much," says George, rather uncomfortable at being catechised, and anxious not to go beyond his depth; "but, to tell you the truth, I never give it much of a thought. I expect I'll get to heaven somehow myself, and I don't see the use of worrying about it beforehand!"

Pauline is hooking her whip into her horse's mane, and tangling the long coarse hair in her embarrassment. She wishes she could make George comprehend her. At last she suddenly brings him to book with a question which would better have befitted a Calvinist minister severely examining a youthful aspirant to holy orders, than a foolish, puzzled young woman who knows nothing but that she knows nothing.

"Do you believe all the Bible?"

"My word!" says George, with cheerful alacrity. If that is what she has been driving at, he is pleased to be able to show her that he is thoroughly orthodox.

"Every word?" she repeats impatiently.

"Rather!" answers George, with decisive triumph. "Oh, never you fear; I may have my faults—I don't say I haven't—but I'm not quite so bad as that. I'm not a heathen or a—what's that you call it?—an infidel. No one can say that of me, thank the Lord!" he adds devoutly.

"Then of course you wouldn't marry an infidel?"

"What do you mean?" he says, looking at her in astonishment. "I'm not going to marry a black gin."

"No!" she replies, still toying with the mane in perplexed fashion, and speaking as if the words refused to articulate themselves readily. "And I'm sorry that if I confess to you all my doubts and difficulties, for indeed I can't help having them, you should put me on the level of a black gin. I see that your *faith*"—is there the very faintest infusion of scorn in her voice as she emphasises this word?—"is too strong to be assailable. Weaker people, like I am," she adds hesitatingly, "would not be sustained as you seem to be by meditating on 'Old Nick' and his pitchfork. Now, have I told you plainly enough what my religious standard is; and don't you think while there's time you'd better leave me?"

"Leave you—good God—leave you for what?"

"For being an infidel," she says harshly, and the old



defiant expression comes back and lends a strange glitter to her dark eyes. George literally jumps in his saddle.

"You're taking a rise out of me, I know," he says in a grieved voice. Then, as he sees her earnest face and set lips, he suddenly changes his tone. "I don't care what you are. If you were to tell me you were a murderess, do you think I could help loving you? You'll always be a good girl to me, won't you, my love?—that's all I've got to think about. I know my mother used to put criminals and Turks and infidels, and all that crowd, into the same boat—but I daresay you'll be all right before you die. Only look here, Pauline—don't you go talking to anybody about religion. It's not the thing, somehow; and do, for the Lord's sake, let the subject drop between us. I'm sure I don't want to hear anything about the dashed matter as long as I live."

One would almost have called George sulky during the remainder of the ride. If Pauline had confessed to him that she said her prayers every night in Chinese to the spirit of her great-uncle the Jesuit, he could hardly have felt more uncomfortable. Nothing could affect his love for her. This sentiment, indeed, had absorbed all the intensity of feeling of which George's nature was capable, but it annoyed him that she should be "peculiar." He supposed there were excuses to be made for her on account of the strain of foreign blood in her veins. Her grandmother was a little cracked, that was certain. He must raise some good clergyman to talk to her one of these days. It was quite out of his line of business, for the long and short of it was, he didn't know what on earth she was talking about half the time. He didn't see for his own part why people should quarrel with their religion any more than with their food. His mother was as good a woman as ever stepped, and she never missed taking him to church as soon as he could walk. However, Pauline had agreed to let the matter drop, and he supposed she'd go to church when they were in town just for the look of the thing. On the station it wouldn't so much matter. He'd had a round game there himself of a Sunday with Teddy O'Connor and the police magistrate, but he took jolly



good care it shouldn't get wind. Such is the nature of his reflections.

Pauline rides in silence too, but there is more of hopeless sadness than of sulkiness in her face. She hardly heeds the streaks of colour around and above her, or is conscious that the balmy evening air is blowing against her forehead as the bold burning sun dips down behind the hills to take his turn at scorching the Ethiopians instead of the Australians. The rest that is overtaking all living creatures will not come, in ever so small a part, to her soul. She has never felt so estranged from George as at the present moment. She has never known till now how much of her being was engrossed in such thoughts as George would annihilate or nullify simply because their utterance conveyed no meaning to his mind. And she feels intuitively that the lack of communion between them in this one respect will extend to every relation in life, will close her lips when she is moved by the fairness of such a scene as this, when her heart throbs a response to some scheme of reform, when a new or wonderful discovery lets in a particle of the light by which we fain would read the riddle of existence, when the melody of rhythmical words sets bright images dancing to pleasant music in her brain.

Henceforth she must lead a dual life: one for the man who has alone made life worth having—and even now her heart goes out in sudden tenderness as she thinks of Chubby—and another for herself. Of this latter life George will know nothing. “And he would not care even if he did know,” she thinks to herself. “I should have been far better pleased if he had been a rigid Puritan or a bigoted Catholic. He would have had to *think* at least, and there would have been something to go upon—for after all, if people's interests are the same, it would not so much matter if their opinions were different.”

And this trite conclusion brings her home, where the first object that catches her eye is a tail of Fifine's fluttering cap ribbon waving behind the creepers like a new sort of flower.

“C'est que madame attend mademoiselle pour le dîner,” explains Fifine in shrill French, with George



standing close by, his outstretched arms held in readiness to receive Pauline when she slips from the saddle.

"Et monsieur aussi, comme de juste," responds Pauline, frowning. "Of course you'll stay to dinner; won't you, Mr. Drafton?"

George hesitates. He is thinking of Madame Delaunay, but even her presence cannot interfere with his seeing Pauline. "Yes; he will stay, then," and he delivers over the horses to a blear-eyed gardener, who though an old convict and a stutterer to boot, is regarded as somewhat of an authority by the inmates of Beau-Séjour on the strength of his being the only adult male attached to the establishment.

George is on a familiar footing by this time with all the ways of the house. He follows unguided the tortuous passage leading to the spare-room, twists his sandy moustache into a semi-spiral curl, and goes straight to the dining-room, where Fifine is arranging little troughs of flowers round the table. He would like to make a friend of the waiting-maid. It is hard lines for him, he thinks, that he should have to ingratiate himself with every one about the place; but it is madame's fault, and George has long ago determined to have the best of it with her.

Fifine, although her skin has acquired by this time the shiny consistency of a rather stale apple (she had been a very fresh-looking girl in her time), is too much of a Frenchwoman to miss the opportunity of bandying a few words with anything in trousers. Her bright, beady eyes give a hasty sidelong glance at the mirror opposite, and seeing therein the reflection of a natty head under its provoking little cap of crimped muslin and cherry-coloured ribbon, they turn upon the intruder with an expression of smiling inquiry.

"Vat does monsieur seek?"

"Je shairshe les papier," says George, with confidence. He carried off the French prize at school some fifteen years back, and feels that to be diffident about his pronunciation would be to cast a slur upon Mr. Racine de Tomkyns, who was a Frenchman in every respect save that he had never been in France.

"En effet, le journal de ce matin doit se trouver ici. Si monsieur veut bien attendre un petit moment."



Fifine whisks past him, and turns over the heap of papers on the side-table, talking all the time.

“*Quel temps délicieux pour se promener à cheval! et quel cavalier que monsieur! et mademoiselle donc! Est-ce qu'elle est bien en Amazone. Allez!*”

Fifine's raptures are what George would call rather mixed, as far as his comprehension of them goes. He gathers that she is willing to make herself agreeable, and when Fifine at last thinks it time to find the paper—she had seen it, as it happened, from the beginning—George has a newly-coined half sovereign, fresh from the Sydney mint, in the hand that is to receive the paper.

“*Cah. C'est pore voo!*”

The little coin slides into her dainty apron pocket as naturally as if it were going home, and Fifine nods her head deprecatingly.

“*Mon Dieu! que monsieur est gentil. C'est moi qui le dis!*”

Fifine trips back to the table after he has gone.

“*Est il amoureux fou, ce garçon-là.*”

She examines her money by the waning light that comes in through the open window, and turns back to the table with a smile.

Both Madame Delaunay and Chubby are in the drawing-room as George enters it. If it were not for the presence of Pauline he would never come to Beau-Séjour at all. Madame's courtly hospitality to her guest does not deceive him in the least. He knows that she has suspended hostilities because she has been worsted in the combat.

What, in point of fact, remained for her to do? She had made an agreement with Mr. Drafton, and he had fulfilled his share of it to the letter. The right of deciding had been taken out of her hands when she had promised that Pauline herself should be the only arbitrator in the matter; but Pauline's leaning was evidently not towards George, and her grandmother had felt comparatively at ease about her. Then suddenly there had happened an event which, like a catastrophe in an orderly succession of natural occurrences, had upset all her calculations—an event no human foresight could have averted. Pauline, delivered from the horror of a lifelong sorrow and remorse, willingly takes upon herself a lifelong burden.



Madame lays aside all assumption of authority, and pleads by right only of her love and anxiety—pleads with Pauline, pleads with George. But they both combine against her. Ay! there is the stab, there is the fierce wound that madam must now carry unhealed to her grave.

Chubby in his innocence calls Mr. Drafton a visitor, and thinks that Pauline must soon leave him for her own people; yet this is the interloper before whom Madame Delaunay has been humiliated to the point of praying uselessly to her granddaughter, her little girl, accustomed to fetch and carry for her without question. She cannot calm herself sufficiently to see the matter from another point of view, to remember that after all George is under the influence of a strong passion, and Pauline in a condition of exaltation, something like that which has induced people to die rather than renounce.

She makes no more effort to bias either. Pauline is only sensible of the chilly atmosphere which seemed to surround her when, as a little child, she was under a cloud for some misdemeanour. She does not guess at the real state of madame's feelings. Heaven only knows what tortures may assail a proud and reserved nature. The heart that is bleeding to death cannot open itself to the love that would staunch the wound.

So all the pleasant preliminaries of a marriage are made bitter instead of sweet.

Even when Pauline timidly refers to the subject of her trousseau, madame only replies, "You feel well that in the affairs of toilette I know not myself. *Fifine* is there, is it not?"

"Yes; but about the expense, *grand'mère*?" persists Pauline.

She hates having to think for herself in such a matter as this, as one might hate being forced to declare a birthday in presence of a parsimonious god-father.

"All that is nothing," says madame wearily; "one has put aside two hundred pounds. It is true you are not dowried, Monsieur Drafton is informed of it—there is a long time. When I die there will be yet something for you—but not much—not much."

There was no question of Pauline's father in the affair, for the good reason that nobody knew where he was to be found. His last letter, dated from Malta,



hinted vaguely at his leaving the service—since which time he had ceased to write altogether. So this is how it comes about that of all the dwellers at Beau-Séjour, the only one whose happiness is unalloyed during the six weeks preceding the marriage is Fifine. Shopping—*carte blanche* to give orders—dozens of shopmen skipping about at her bidding—consultations with Miss Straitlace—a sense of importance never dreamed of—all this has fallen to Fifine's share. It is in council with her that Pauline makes out her lists; it is her taste that decides the colour of a bonnet or the shape of a jacket. Since the days when she danced at Neuilly on a Sunday afternoon she has never felt so happy as now when, seated by Pauline's side in a hansom cab, she drives from shop to shop and talks "chiffons, encore des chiffons et toujours des chiffons."

There is something of an artistic pleasure, too, in dressing so beautiful a body as Pauline's; in fitting smooth velvet on to her round bust, in trying the effect of madame's rich store of costly old lace on her polished white arms. Miss Straitlace is only allowed to grapple with the minor difficulties. It is Fifine who arranges the folds of the train, and contemptuously casting aside an old bodice of the Straitlace cut, fits Pauline after true French fashion, a fashion never old because it is always natural. It is almost touching during these times to see how Pauline looks round for her grandmother. She will run over the house from attic to kitchen in search of her, clad in a half-made dress, that she may appeal to her judgment. Madame, on her side, is bent upon eluding her. "Do you find then, that it gives me so much pleasure to see you arrayed for the *rôle* of Iphigénie?"

It has already befallen George to be consulted about his preference for a colour; but upon that head Pauline has learnt to be wary. An innocent remark made to fill up a pause, such as, "Did you notice how well black suits Jamesina? Those gold ornaments she wore at the concert last night were made out of Cape River gold," is enough to send George to all the jewellers in Pitt Street in search of gold yellower and heavier than Jamesina's. A partiality for blue results in the arrival of a whole mountain of forget-me-nots in a silver bouquet-holder.



"I shall never risk saying I like anything again, unless it is the Koh-i-noor, or the Great Mogul," she says to George, as she comes into the drawing-room on this especial evening, wearing on her finger a turquoise ring unaccountably planted in a pretty little box on her dressing-table.

"Well! I'm going to risk saying what I like, anyway," says George in an undertone, while he is looking for a seat next to her. "I like you to be burnt. Some women burn all about the nose, you know; there's Mrs. Paller, for instance. When we go kangarooing on the plains, do you think she'd come without it's a cloudy day? Not a bit of it!"

"Well, why should she?" replies Pauline, enlisting herself in the cause of the delicate-hued Mrs. Paller. "Why should she sacrifice her nose, and perhaps her reputation? Isn't it a sign that people drink too much when their noses are red?"

"No, not always," doubtfully feeling his own nose. "Why, I've seen my nose regular peeling on a hot day on the plains; I daresay it's reddish now, but you mustn't think anything of that! Fair people mostly burn about the nose, you know."

This lover-like discussion on noses is broken by the sound of the dinner-bell. Dinner on the occasion of George's visits is a thing to be got through with as little delay as possible. Madame Delaunay and George are types of such extremely opposite natures, that even the conventional usages of society which make a common meeting ground for all kinds of people fail to reconcile them to each other's company. A refined woman of extreme views and strong dislikes, in manner belonging to an age that is dead, in thought and opinion to an age that is yet to come—what point in common could she find with so palpable an incarnation of a modern go-ahead age as George? He is as old as the civilisation of the country in which he is born. The growth of past ages, the mystery of the future, the advancement of the present, are alike indifferent to him. To make money, to get on individually, to win a race—yes—this last was the summit of his ambition until he knew Pauline. But knowing Pauline has not altered his nature. It has only developed a part of it hitherto



unknown to himself. He loves her. Madame loves her too. Here then must be the bond which is to unite them. But this very bond tends rather to separate than to draw them together. Does George love in Pauline what madame loves? Does he know her as madame knows her? Does he even see in her the qualities which have endeared her to madame—the ready comprehension, the power of throwing herself into the interests of others, the loftiness of disposition which may make her guilty of great faults, but never of petty ones? or will these very parts of her character be ignored by George, or acknowledged only in so far as they may minister to his own limited spiritual requirements?

All this in the wake of a conversation on noses! The connection is hardly evident—but at dinner the eaters hardly talk. It must be supposed that, as in the case of the parrot, they think the more. Hence the transcribing of their thoughts. Madame remembers with bitterness that the intuitive sympathy she has been vaunting in her grandchild never failed her until now were it not for this intruder who exacts so costly a reward for a courageous impulse.

Pauline must long ago have seen that quite a new sorrow has succeeded to the ancient grief. She cannot tell how her grandmother looked when Rosalie died. She can only just remember creeping awestruck from the stony face that had turned to look at her after it had been bending over the sheet which concealed her grandfather's body, but without any of these reminiscences she might guess that it is not Rosalie's death or Henri Delaunay's death which has brought the new wrinkles under madame's eyes.

The short Australian twilight has given way to a calm starlit night by the time dinner is over. George looks uneasily at the verandah, then at Pauline, then at the verandah again, and forms his mouth into the shape of "Come outside." Madame sees the lovers defile through the glass doors with a renewed pang. "It is cold, Ernest; shut the window, my child," she says, shuddering. They need not flaunt their laboured love exchanges in her face.

Pauline does not give George time to ignore his agreement with her. It is a night for throwing such conditions to the wind. The flowers are lavish of their



sweetness to the air. The mingled scents would be almost cloying were it not for the light current of brine-laden breeze coming in from the sea. Pauline is standing with her back to the verandah railings. George is lolling in an easy-chair at her feet. Whenever the summer lightning rifts the sky for an unseizable instant he can see her grave face in a frame of curly leaves above him. Why does she always seem the farthest away when she is there in the flesh close to him, when her breath and the passion-flower near her head seem to send out their sweetness together? She has hardly given him a moment to feel this intoxicating influence before she has hurt him by her words. The darkness and the shield of leafy sprays, and the memory of the day's conversation, all give her courage.

"I am going to ask you a favour, Mr. Drafton!"—it is wonderful how hard she finds it to call him George. "Will you let me speak for a moment quite hypothetically."

Instinctively George scratches the back of his head. For aught he knows this may imply the use of some incomprehensible language.

"Fire away," he says at last; "but mind you, none of the infidel racket. And don't stand there like a statue. I'll listen to you if you'll sit here."

"No, I can only speak from here." How chilly her voice sounds from among the leaves. "Supposing somebody—some imaginary person, of course—were to come to you to-morrow and say, 'Mr. Drafton, you love Pauline Vyner ever so much better than she deserves; you are wasting your love on her—she is not worth it. She could be your truest friend, and give you her gratitude—well, I won't say gratitude, then—but don't please use bad language about it—and give you affection, and do anything in the world for you excepting make you a good wife.' You don't answer—it's all hypothesis, you know. Well, if such a person were to come to you, what would you do?"

"Kick him for being a meddling ass, and trying to blast a fellow's happiness," replies George bitterly; then in a tone of forced unconcern, "but of course I wouldn't believe him!"

"But if you did believe him?" persists the girl tremblingly.



"I should be inclined to kick him all the same; but I'd come to you as I do now," getting up and taking her by either shoulder, "and say, 'Pauline, you *promised* me!' Don't, for God's sake, be for ever bringing in your tormenting notions. They're enough to drive a man mad. You'll be quite a good enough wife—never fear; and, Pauline, I can't give you up—it's no use—I can't do it."

He takes her to him with vehemence. She does not willingly oppose him, but her passive resistance is more freezing than struggles and protestations on the part of another.

"Sit down again, Mr. Drafton, and be quite quiet. I was only imagining a case. We won't talk about it any more."

She half turns her back to him and looks up at the glittering lights overhead. It is a kind of night rare enough even in the clear atmosphere of the south, a night upon which to lose the sense instinctive in children and savages that there is an opaque dome above us well lined with lamps in our behoof. Upon such a night as this, when there are no clouds and the moon has not yet risen, a sudden conviction of infinite black space is forced upon us. The nearer and the farther worlds around take their right places before our bodily eyes, and we can almost feel ourselves giddily sweeping on in a sort of vast monotony; a dread foreshadowing of eternity appals us, and we want to cling to something as helpless as ourselves, if it will only reassure us against our own thoughts. Pauline is almost glad to be awakened roughly by George's injured voice.

"What are you thinking of next, I'd like to know? Another of your plans for taking all the heart out of me, eh?"

"Oh no! I wasn't thinking of you at all." Suddenly her voice softened. "Don't be vexed, George. I dare-say it isn't either of our faults. I'll do all I can—there. Perhaps if we were in one of those other worlds there wouldn't be a hitch. Which would you like if you could choose?"

She holds back the curtain of leaves, and shows him through the opening the Southern Cross and its attendant pointers shining like miniature unblemished moons.



"I don't know," says George, still aggrieved; "I know there's a deal of rot talked about their being other worlds, and all that sort of thing. In my opinion the stars are stuck up there just like the sun and moon. I'm sure we want all the light we can get on a dark night; and as to their being big, and all that sort of thing, there's nothing to prove it!"

"I suppose you want a fresh proof that the world is round, do you?" says Pauline.

"I don't know, and I don't much care," he responds. "After all, what's the use of it? Let them tell us something useful, and I'll believe them fast enough. Let them name the winner of the next Melbourne Cup. That's all I'll trouble them for."

"It's getting cold," says Pauline, quite irrelevantly. "Come in and sing 'Tommy Dodd.' I'll play the accompaniment for you."



## CHAPTER IX.

### *THE PREPARATION.*

**"Behaviour is a mirror in which every one shows his image."**

—GOETHE.

THE bearing of an engaged girl is always a favourite psychological study on the part of her girl friends. They criticise her among themselves as she enters the room with quite a new interest in her person; they have their own opinions concerning the number of dances it is permissible to sit out with the betrothed; the more daring bestow a meaning little smile on the pair sitting in the shadow on the staircase while the lancers or quadrilles are being decorously struggled through in the ballroom.

It is a feeling of this kind which prompts Jamesina to walk over to Beau-Séjour on the morning when the rumour of Pauline's engagement reaches her as a certain fact for the first time. That she may have some one to carry her gossamer veil in case it is hot, and her knitted cloud in case there is a little breeze, she makes a descent upon the schoolroom and pounces upon the most presentable of the various Crokers in all stages of the knickerbocker period there assembled. Nolly is waved aside because the concentric rings on his stockings merge into each other after a fashion which suggests that they have been dragged over the carpet, and Jemmy must not come because he is so bow-legged and kicks up the dust.

"It's a choice of evils," remarks Jamesina plaintively, scanning them, with the ivory knob of her parasol handle between her teeth, while Miss Rule, the sallow-hued governess, stands in a deprecating attitude to listen to her.

"I think Willie's the least objectionable of the lot; but brothers are frightful nuisances; don't you think so, Miss Rule?"



Miss Rule smiles, and emits a weakly little sound from the throat signifying anything the hearer may choose to make of it—then draws down the corners of her mouth and looks immature vengeance at a child with an enormous head, that has put its left leg on the table and is trying to draw the inkstand towards it with its foot.

Willie is rather a white-faced, wistful little boy. One is inclined to think him pretty until the incongruity of two large ears, which seem to have fetched away from his cropped, compressed head, is forced upon one by their prominence. Then the face becomes a perplexing study, for the ear flaps interfere at every point of view. They look like handles from behind, and like cabbage leaves in front. Willie must grow bushy whiskers, or become a man of mark, if he is ever to rise above his ears—if he does not want to suggest fleeting ideas of a garrulous, avaricious old king, the butt of ancient mythology. Miss Rule has been known to rap his knuckles, but neither she nor any of the preceding governesses have ever overcome an instinctive aversion to boxing his ears. Now, as he draws over his white head a cap with skirts such as are made for children in hot countries, his ears immediately adjust themselves to the skirts like the fulness of a crinoline to a starched dress. Protected by these bulgy projections, he meekly follows his sister. Neither he nor any of his brothers, neither Mrs. Croker nor any of the household, would dream of opposing a mandate that had issued from the lips of Jamesina.

“Now, don’t you whistle, and don’t clack, and don’t tread on my dress, and whatever you do, don’t snore!”

This apparently incongruous direction as a preliminary to setting out for a morning walk is in reference to an oppression on the chest complained of by Willie, resulting in a somewhat laboured breathing.

The brother and sister walk on in silence through the calm morning air, joyous with the twirls of hundreds of insects, until Jamesina is aware that the tassel of her cloud is trailing in the dust. Her pink cheeks flame into sudden scarlet with indignation.

“You wicked boy! how dare you? My new cloud! You did it on purpose—you know you did!”

She snatches it from him angrily, and inspects the



dusty corner. Willie instinctively puts his hand to his head. Jamesina is the only person who has ever visited those large ears with her smart little hand.

"You little fool! Do you think I'm going to hit you? Here, roll it up, and carry it this way, do you see! You've made me quite hot with your stupidity."

But this is the girl who ten minutes later greets Pauline in Madame Delaunay's drawing-room with the most engaging little smile.

"I shan't forgive you, my dear, for not coming to tell me all about it long and long ago," she says, after her china-blue eyes have taken a rapid survey of Pauline's general appearance from the crown of her head to the shiny points of her morning shoes. "In the first place, when is it to come off?"

"About the twentieth, I think," replied Pauline, with very little animation of manner; then glancing at Willie, whose little white face seems all merged into red ear and large bright eye, "Your little brother looks tired, doesn't he? Let me take him to Chubby and get him an orange before we talk any more."

When she comes back Jamesina has pulled off her gloves from her carefully-tended hands, and is evidently prepared for confidences.

"I never heard it till this morning, do you know? Pa said Mr. Seefar told it to him, and of course I suppose he heard it from Mr. Drafton himself. We were all so glad. Ma told me to congratulate you. You *are* a lucky girl, my dear."

"I suppose I am," says Pauline, a little wearily.

"And," pursues Jamesina, "I can't help saying I do believe that picnic's at the bottom of it. Do you know it's the funniest thing altogether! Sir Francis Segrave was to have come! You remember Sir Francis Segrave, don't you?"

Remember him! Pauline wishes Jamesina would not scan her so curiously as she asks the question.

"Oh! I daresay you do! Well, what do you think, my dear! if Sir Francis *had* come, there couldn't possibly have been any accident, because, do you see, that was the horse he was to have ridden, that horse that Chubby was holding, you know; none of the others rub their blinkers off. Such a thing was never heard of!"



"And why didn't he come?"

Pauline could frame her question, she thinks, in the easiest way in the world, if Jamesina would not keep her eyes fixed upon her in that steadfast way. It is bad taste, to say the least of it, to stare. Her spirit of resistance comes to her aid, and she makes Jamesina lower her eyelids, as she returns her look unflinchingly.

"Why didn't he come, you say? Only fancy, my dear, the very morning of the picnic the mail came in. You know how late it was this time. It went away that very night, and Sir Francis had to go with it, because, poor fellow, he got some bad news or other about his mother or sister, or something of the sort,"—a pause, Jamesina draws patterns on the drawing-room carpet with the point of her parasol, then with a suggestive intonation—"but I daresay he'll come out again!"

"You mean that you *know* he will," rejoins Pauline drily.

Again she asks herself how she dare have any feeling in the matter now. Again the corners of her lips twitch as they frame the direct question, very quietly put, "Are you engaged to Sir Francis Segrave, Jamesina?"

"Engaged, my dear! Good gracious!" Jamesina laughs. "What an idea! *I'm* not in such a hurry to be married," with a little stress on the *I*. "I wouldn't have anything to say to Sir Francis Segrave, I can assure you. It isn't my fault, I'm sure," plaintively, "it isn't my fault if people *will* be gone upon me, is it?"

This is accompanied with a sigh implying that she is really sorry for being the innocent cause of so much suffering.

"Show me what you've got in that locket, my dear, and I'll show you something too. His sister's there too, you know, so it's all right!"

Jamesina giggles as she turns over the bunch of precious trifles pendent from her watch chain, and selects from among miniature golden gridirons, farm implements, and a sort of Lilliputian kitchen range, a flat album of dead gold in the shape of a small atlas.

"There, my dear!" she puts it with an air of triumph into Pauline's outstretched hand. "Now let's have a look at your locket—do!"

If in passing over her lover's likeness to Jamesina



the likeness George had himself fastened round her neck, while he kissed the place on her white throat that it was to hide from his covetous eyes, Pauline could have passed over the real living lover too! But hearts will not love to order, or else the amount of domestic discord in the world would soon become a question of numbers only. A due balance of the sexes would set everything right, and now where there are jars and worries and fruitless arguments there would be households conducted after the model of the turtle-doves' nest, and a cooing reciprocity of sentiment instead of a bickering antagonism. Pauline does not open the golden album that she has taken from Jamesina. She cannot see it, she says, in this light, and she moves across to the window, where she can look at it unobserved. She had known so little of the man. He had interested her, that was all. He had a pleasant voice; it would have made the dullest party an assemblage of delights to have him come and talk to her now and then. She was sure he did not speak to Jamesina in quite the same way, nor about the same things. She fights afresh against such futile musings, and opens the album behind the shelter of the old flowered satin curtains. The face it discloses is less English than would have been expected from Pauline's impressions of it. Judging it as a whole, it would incline more to the Mephistophelian than to the angelic type; but this is an accident of shape, attributable perhaps to two high cheek-bones and a pointed chin—perhaps to a suggestion of hookiness in the nose, seen in conjunction with the triangular cut of the short black hair, almost forming a point on the forehead. The colouring, too, must be a shade warm for Saxon blood. The eyes of the portrait convey little; it can only be judged that the sitter was looking neither insanely happy nor preternaturally sombre to order. Even a close scrutiny does not betray the flavour of self-consciousness so usually inevitable in the pose of the most unsophisticated victim of a professional photographer. Perhaps the eyes had early tutored themselves to look out upon this funny medley called the world without betraying their impressions of it. Pauline looks her hardest at them; their impassibility is baffling. She



remembers now, that if they had any power at all, it lay more in their faculty for following other peoples' thoughts than for revealing those of their owner. She tries to make something of the mouth, but the lips are closed under the long military moustaches—then she turns suddenly to Jamesina and asks for her own locket again. George's face has been advantageously set off by an admirably chosen tone of colouring. He is an excessively fair man, apt to turn red in the summer-time; the artist has interpreted this complexion by a tinge of golden bronze. His eyebrows are so light as to be almost undistinguishable; in the portrait they are defined by a narrow line of brown. His sandy wiry moustache and beard are here and there interspersed with skilful dark touches; a nose insignificant by nature has been coaxed into the suspicion of an arch by a little extra shade towards its tip. The nostrils, rather full in the real man, have been mercifully smoothed down in the likeness, and the crop of dead, light hair has developed lights and shades unknown in the original. The light-blue eyes stare with such lifelike intentness at Pauline that she is almost startled whenever she opens her locket.

Poor George had been wonderfully gratified by this portrait.

"You've made a devilish good job of it," he said to the bland photographer—"not a mere protrait taker, but an artist, sir, you'll please to understand"—"a devilish good job, there's no mistake about it."

Pauline had looked so long at the likeness when George, flushed with anticipation, had put it into her hands, that he became impatient for her verdict.

"Well! does it suit you, eh? Do you think you'll be ashamed to whip it out when any of your young lady friends want to know what I'm like?"

"It's you, certainly," she replies; "it's exactly like you; but it's you idealised."

"Oh, bother the idealised!" he says. "Of course it's painted up, but it can't alter the features."

Then ensues the episode of his placing it round her neck. Pauline has worn it there ever since. The gold feels cold to her flesh as she replaces it now and restores the album to Jamesina.



"I'm dying to have a look at your trousseau, my dear," remarks Miss Croker, hooking her album into its place among the utensils. "You can't think how ma envies you that French maid. We had one, you know, but she made such a lot of mischief, you can't think. Ma declares she used to run after pa!"

It is a sight to see Jamesina appraise the silk and fine linen upstairs. Those limpid orbs travel over the room at express speed. Mrs. Croker will be informed with mathematical exactitude how and in what order tucks succeed to insertion and insertion to tucks. Intricacies of lace and flounces are made clear by her innate apprehension of the fitness of things with regard to trimmings. All the time she is speaking to Pauline she is carrying away in her mind for immediate reproduction a grey feather hat, a knotted black velvet sash, a whole silk train, buttons, fringes, and ribands included.

When Miss Croker affirmed of Pauline Vyner that she could hardly be said to belong to any set at all, she spoke the strict and literal truth. Among her friends she counted none who could have laid claims to any intimacy with Jamesina. Girls much younger than herself, mature married people, both husband and wife—the old convict gardener—people who had become living realities to her through the books they had written—all these were her friends. In Jamesina's presence she never feels at ease. That Willie (loth to go) should put his hand into hers, as she is seeing her visitors to the gate, seems natural enough. Children see something in Pauline that draws them to her; but that Jamesina should go through the form of giving her a company kiss is rather a marvel to her. Perhaps it is accounted for by the words which accompany the kiss.

"I say, my dear, did I tell you about the confirmation? I forget. It's to come off the week after next, you know. I daresay you're very busy just now, but ma would be so much obliged if you'd just send your French maid over with that pattern for a muslin body. You might let her hang my skirt too, you know. I'm not giving my dress out to be made, for if there's one thing I'm more anxious about than another, it is to have it look unstudied. If you knew the trouble I've had with it already!"



Jamesina heaves another sigh, but this time it is a sincere one, because the pity is for herself.

"Of course!" Pauline says she will speak to her grandmother at once if Jamesina likes, but she can answer for Ffine being allowed to come whenever Mrs. Croker is in need of her.

"You see," continues Jamesina, too much absorbed in a question of such fundamental importance to notice Mr. Drafton's horse in the distance, "the great point in these affairs is to be simply as well as elegantly dressed. Everything must be good, of course. I don't believe there's a shop ma and I haven't hunted for real Valenciennes, with the most innocent little pattern you ever saw. And the muslin, my dear! it's that fine, fine sort baby's caps are made of, don't you know. Now whether to have it cut in a square or a V, that's what I can't make up my mind about."

She fixes her eyes anxiously on Pauline's face. Her own view of the matter is too serious to enable her to perceive anything but polite interest in Pauline's expression.

"You want to appear *en ingenue*, do you? It is a *rôle* that should suit you capitally. Nature has helped you to fill it already."

Jamesina might ask for an explanation if it did not happen that George's chestnut trots past her just at this moment. She returns George's bow with one of her appealing glances, and turns away with her brother.

"Jolly nice girl, that!" says George approvingly, as he walks by Pauline's side to the house. "I expect you're great chums."

"No; we're not friends—at least, not *real* friends," she explains.

"You look devilish like it, that's all I can say. What was she yarning about all that time, I'd like to know?"

"About a dress for her confirmation," returns Pauline, with a half smile.

"Jolly sensible girl, too; that's what I'd like to see you doing. You should go in for being confirmed, and all that sort of thing. But never mind; we've struck a bargain, haven't we? I'm not the one to cry off."

"A bargain about our being married?" she cries with sudden eagerness.



"No! you know I don't mean that;" George looks at her suspiciously. "About our never talking religion."

"Oh yes! I remember," dejectedly.

"And look here, Pauline!—hold hard while I tie up the mare—I've got something to show you. There's a precious sort of uncle for a fellow to have," fumbling in his pocket for a letter which he gives her to read; "a rum kind of a fist, isn't it?"

Pauline looks curiously at the confused scrawl.

"It seems to be made of twists, I think, unless these isolated corkscrews mean 'I.' Do you want me to read the letter aloud, George?"

"Yes. I'd like to see if you can make head or tail of it. Skip all that first part. It's only a piece of his fine advice about the station."

"There are some words here as puzzling as yours—your spoken words, I mean," Pauline remarks, as she makes her way to a verandah chair with her finger on the sentence she is to begin upon. "Now for it. 'I vote'—no—'I note what you say about betting'—Oh, do you bet, then, Mr. Drafton?"

"Not to speak of," replies George, reddening a little; "but you're all out—take my word for it; there's nothing about betting in the letter. I'll tell you what it is."

He comes and stands behind her chair.

"It's 'getting,'" she cries, "only the words run downhill—'about your getting settled in life. I'—do please go on with it yourself. I think Hebrew must be easier!"

"Well then, here goes!" says George, leaning over her shoulder, content if only a stray hair of her head may touch his cheek. "'I note what you say about getting settled in life. I conclude it's with a view to importing a New South Waler into Victoria. I could have give you your pick of a lot of Melbourne girls, as good a wife as a man need have. But you may take a horse to the water; you can't make him drink. A pitcher will go often to the well, and get broke at the last. I know there's several in the market in your district. I advise you to think over this. I'— Oh, the rest doesn't matter," says George, hastily crumpling up the letter. "I just thought you'd like to see his style."



"Thank you; it's an original style, but I think I've seen enough to judge of it for the present. Is that another letter you want me to read?"

George is turning over an envelope addressed in a running commercial hand easy to decipher.

"Yes! that's from the fellow in charge while I'm away; he's a sort of half gentleman, you know."

Pauline can read it glibly.

"DEAR MR. DRAFTON,—I have carried out all your instructions with reference to the place. The list of things you ordered from McEwan's came up last week. The four-poster bed was too high for the bedroom; we took up some of the planking and made a rest for it under the floor. The new carpet is down in the front room, and the blacksmith is at work rehinging the house and putting a stove into the kitchen fireplace. We are getting the garden dug up, and doing our best to make the place look trim for Mrs. Drafton. I fear she won't see it to advantage. We want rain badly. There isn't a blade of grass on the plains; the last mob of sheep we draughted were looking awfully poor—more fit for the boiling down pot than the Melbourne market; travelling mobs are passing through every day"—

"There, that's enough," says George, taking the letter out of her hands. "You don't care about fluky sheep! Just listen to this, though. 'Miss Nell is in splendid condition. She should make a first-rate lady's hack. The Panic colt is looking game. McCabe says you mean to put him in training for the Victorian Derby.' That's to show you a bit about my horses," George remarks, folding up the letter.

"Are you very fond of them?" inquires Pauline, looking up at him.

"I should think I was. I'd be fretting to get back to them now if it wasn't for you."

"And they? are they very fond of you?"

"Of course they're fond of me—but they're not the same as dogs, you know. My dog—he goes fair mad when I come back to the station."

"Then I may talk about the horses and the dogs as much as ever I like, mayn't I?" she asks suddenly; then



half in an undertone, "Shall I be something better than the dog, and a little dearer than the horse, I wonder?"

George eschews poetry. He does not therefore follow the allusion, but he is overpowered that Pauline should put herself in the balance with his animals.

"You'll always be all the world to me, I know that," he replies, "and sometimes when you're so cold to me, I think I know it to my cost."

"Everybody's world is not just what they would like to make it," says Pauline softly. "I hope truly, earnestly, it won't be my fault if you have to complain of yours."



## CHAPTER X.

### THE CONSUMMATION.

" Oh, now for ever,  
arewell the tranquil mind ! farewell content ! "  
—SHAKSPERE.

TIME, which passes so quickly when we are happy, passes more quickly still when an event is impending that we cannot see our way to avert. That is why, the nearer the marriage day approached, the more did Madame Delaunay compare herself with the victim of a certain ghastly relation in *Blackwood's Magazine*, called "The Iron Shroud." The circumstances that were to crush her by their force pressed harder every day. Every day a remaining hope, like a remaining window of the diabolical metal room, passed away. When the last window had moved out of sight, the prisoner in the tale might still have beaten his head against the wall ; but what moral suicide will avail where the affections are concerned ? Madame Delaunay could not have deadened her soul-smart though she had knocked her head, typically speaking, against all the causes of her suffering. She saw George come and go with outward calm ; like a person signing her own death-warrant she wrote all conventional notes (Pauline had stipulated that the wedding should take place on any other than the officially-named twentieth, and that it should be as private as a pauper's funeral)—and she gathered together Rosalie's jewels, and packed them up in soft cotton, like an automaton going through a task for which it has been previously wound up.

So the time went relentlessly on, until the eve of the wedding-day, red with the fiery promise of a rose-coloured dawn, arrived at last. Pauline had been walking restlessly over the house, in the belief that she was making a collection of her personal treasures scattered through the rooms. In real truth she had been driving thought



away. "He is so fond of me ; I owe him my life !" She harps upon this theme with a feverish resolution. If nature cries out, "Your grandmother is right ; you are not at one with him," she checks nature's cry by the force of her determination. "But I will be at one with him ! Grand'mère shall see that I am happy. Husbands and wives have a thousand interests in common. If I am a mother, shall I care whether George discusses theology or the solar system when we spend our evenings together ?"

Such a reflection, suggesting a recollection of Chubby's scared face during those few moments of horror, stirs Pauline's heart to its very depths. If George were there now what would he not think and feel at sight of her tender eyes ?

It is late before the packing is all accomplished. The trunks are to be sent to Melbourne by the morrow's steamer. Mr. and Mrs. Drafton are to start on their travels the same day. They are to journey overland to Melbourne, and this will constitute the honeymoon trip. George has bought a new buggy. He himself will drive the pair of horses he has chosen. Pauline has studiously selected for a travelling dress something that is sombre, and that might suit a matron of sixty.

"A bride in such a funereal colour, and in a hat that has been retrimmed, is a thing unheard of, Fifine ; I must only look out for a collar that is a little frayed, and a pair of gloves with a properly prominent hole, to be taken for an old married woman."

Fifine cannot refrain from a pitying shrug. "Allons, mamzelle ! vous aviez joliment du temps. Pendant bien des années encore vous aurez l'air d'une jeune fille."

Pauline cannot conceal from herself that she looks ridiculously young when she tries on the sedate robe before going to bed at night. Her chamber looks bare, divested of its little ornaments, and the dark travelling dress that she has thrown across a trunk seems to fill it with a gloomy presence. She turns up the gas, and stands with bare neck and arms before the glass under its fullest light. She sees a white girlish figure, soft with the pliability of youth, round-armed, white-shouldered, slender-throated ; a girlish face, with two heavily fringed, bronzily-dark, startled eyes



shining out of it ; a whole pile of half-coiled, half-falling hair, that seems to catch sparks from the flame above, and send them travelling over its obscure mass ; and two tightly-closed, undulating, deeply-red lips, set like those of a child that has made up its mind not to cry. To-morrow she will of her own free-will give all this up to George. To-morrow he will say in the usual formula, "With my body I thee worship," and the matter of her beauty and power will become a relative more than an actual question. If Pauline were a soulless Circassian, her judges would cry out at George's luck, and say that he had run but a petty risk for so rich a prize. But besides the bodily appurtenances, all of which must pass into George's keeping on the morrow, there is somewhere—only, unfortunately, nobody has yet discovered where—a part of Pauline which is more Pauline herself than the eyes, the hair, the neck, the arms, and all the other articles of the inventory ; and if this should remain out of George's reach despite her own good-will, is he really so lucky, so much-to-be-envied a fellow after all ? Yet if we are born blind, are we to be pitied because we do not know what it is to see a sore ? and if George does not perceive in the possession of the body that the mind may still escape him, is he not rather to be congratulated because of the bluntness that is to save him from suffering ?

On the night before her marriage Pauline tries in vain to sleep. A criminal waiting for the sound of the bell that must summon him to his doom would not be more restless or fearful. Her harassing thoughts tire her very brain, and all the time she is tormented by the arrangement of the squares on her bed-curtains. Why will they sometimes form into lines that cross each other, sometimes into a set of diamond-shaped envelopes, sometimes into rings that tremble to their outer edge, like water after a stone has been thrown into it ? Her curtains have never obtruded themselves in such fashion before. And the whole time she is conscious that her dark travelling dress is there, opposite to her, ready to jump on her bed like a nightmare and press upon her breast while she is sleeping.

She is so bewildered, that she does not know whether she is stifling her reflections or they are stifling her.



Whatever it is that makes her lie there, awake and shivering on this most peaceful summer night, she can bear it no longer. She rises, and for the second time turns up the flickering gas until it burns brightly and steadily. Now she has escaped from the squares of her bed-curtains; the room is light—she will try to read. As she passes the glass, she can see the reflection of the dark dress slowly slipping to the ground. With feverish haste she snatches up a dressing-gown of scarlet flannel, and throws it over her shoulders. Then bare-foot she leaves her room, and passes into the moonlight, streaming through the window of the corridor without. Both Madame Delaunay's and Chubby's rooms are close at hand, one at the head of the staircase, the other opposite her own. She can see as she passes the window how broad and white the avenue looks by moonlight. The boughs interlaced above it have cast their shadows on its bright expanse in the form of a network of delicate tracery. It is like a giant brodered scarf bedecking the dark garden. She has stood here before by night, dreaming the dreams carried on the rays of the moon to all who give themselves up for a short space to her weird spell. To the young and unknowing what hazy hopes, what a misty atmosphere of pleasing unreality, do these silvery messengers bring! To the old, to those who know, the silver is tarnished before it can brighten their dull musings. "Those whom the gods love die young!" Oh for a short-lived race of mortals—children—unthinking—revelling in life—dead before they have begun, like Adam, to perceive their own nakedness.

Pauline creeps lightly to her grandmother's door. The door is ajar; all is very dark and very quiet within. Twice she puts a hesitating hand on the handle and twice turns away.

A jilt is no doubt an ugly name, an ugly character. If Pauline had opened the door, and walked into Madame Delaunay's bedroom now, at two o'clock in the morning, a few hours before her wedding, she might have been stigmatised by this ugly name for the rest of her natural life. But the second time she turns away there is no returning. Chubby's door too is ajar, and Pauline does not hesitate to push it open



and walk softly into the room. By the light that streams in from the moonlit passage outside she can see his plump face and open mouth turned towards the door. Like most children of his age, Chubby sleeps profoundly and looks seraphically innocent when asleep. The most poignant form of self-torture that Pauline had ever known in her bygone self-torturing moods was embodied in the imagining of a hurt being done to Chubby while he was asleep. She kneels now by the side of his bed and puts her cheek next to his. Chubby holds her round the neck by one fat arm quite instinctively—he is fast asleep the whole time. Thus imprisoned, Pauline finds room to lie down by his side on the extreme edge of his narrow bed. When her arms are round him the turmoil of her mind gives way. Does she not owe it all to George that his soft regular breathing is even now caressing her cheek?—So she falls peacefully asleep.

“But will you dance in church? Why do you put on party clothes? Will Mr. Drafton put on party clothes too? Will he dance?”

Chubby bombards his patient niece with a string of these inquiries during the awful five minutes intervening from the time of her being ready to the time of her starting for church. He has watched the preparations in a sort of mystified bewilderment, walking round and round the dining-room table below. There is an alarming incongruity in the fruit, the flowers, the ghostly snow-covered cake, that cover it. Chubby admits of a breakfast, a dinner, and a tea. The intrusion of a repast that might have walked straight out of a confectioner's shop window, a repast of any sort instead of his Ollendorff and slate, awes and discomposes him. Chubby toils up to his mother's bedroom to have the disturbing element accounted for. Madame Delaunay is standing stiffly by her dressing-table in a dress that Chubby has never seen. Neither powder or cosmetic have been used to soften the sad austerity of her face. Her grey silk is so unfamiliar—the little boy creeps up to her, “Maman, mettez donc votre robe de chambre, s'il vous plait?” His mother takes his upturned rosy face between her two hands. “Tu es encore de cet age sans pitié, mon enfant,” she says half tenderly, half sadly, “et tu vois pourtant que je saigne au cœur.”



Madame's solemnity achieves Chubby's discomfiture. A smile from his mother would have turned the mysterious meal below into a fairy feast. Now it is a portentous combination of funeral baked meats. He rubs his head sympathetically against madame's skirt, and trots off to Pauline's room. The world may change, but Pauline cannot alter—the very sound of her name means a sense of security and contentment for Chubby. But he has still to learn that there is a new order to which the old must give place. At his time of life the present seems eternal, and one does not realise that things can ever be different. It is the worst of all his shocks to see Pauline, like the picture of Snow-White in his Grimm's Fairy Tales, sitting before the glass, while Fifine fastens orange flowers from the garden below in her hair. Chubby could not have explained that she is dressed in soft white poplin and Brussels lace—he only sees that she is white from head to foot, and that Fifine is choosing the prettiest sprays she can find from a bowl of orange-blossom and sticking them all about her. Two or three times before he has seen her in white, when she was going, as she told him, to dance, and she has danced round the room with him always. But Chubby feels that dancing at the present moment is not in harmony with the day.

Fifine is the first to turn round upon him sharply. "Eh bien! que dis tu, petit drôle?" she says, half indignantly. It is a trial to her that there should be nobody at hand to appreciate her work. Every addition she has made to Pauline's toilette has increased this sense of injury. "Belle affaire," she thinks, to robe mademoiselle for her "futur" and the old clergyman. She would have liked to see a train of twelve bridesmaids, "convenablement mises," to act half as a uniform set-off, half as foils to her young mistress. It aggravates her that Chubby should stare so stolidly. "Les enfants sont des imbéciles; allez!" she remarks, as she flounces from the room, leaving Pauline with an injunction to sit on the edge of her chair and not to "chiffoner" her train. Then it is that Chubby begins his questions.

"No, darling, we won't dance in church,"—Pauline speaks nervously and hurriedly—"only Mr. Drafton's



going to promise to be good to me and I to be good to him, don't you see?"

Chubby is perplexed; he comes closer to Pauline. How Ffine would gesticulate if she could see him put his arm round the veil of Brussels lace and whisper in his niece's ear—

"But don't promise for long, Pauline; how many to-morrows will you promise for?"

"For as many as Mr. Drafton promises for. But wherever I am, Chubby darling," her voice grows tremulous with the effort to speak cheerfully, "I shall always come back to you when you have need of me. It is only because I love you so that I am going away at all. Yes truly, darling, don't mind; it is you who are sending me away, but you will bring me back too. Not all the Mr. Draftons in the world," she adds with vehemence, "should keep me from you if you were ill or alone."

This is ill-advised policy on Pauline's part. Chubby's lips have been working from the beginning of the interview. He cannot control his sobs any longer, and cries like a terrified child who feels the world slipping from under him.

Helplessness is never one of childhood's grievances; because it is unfelt, it is unknown. Only when the protector is gone comes the sense of impotence and desolation.

Pauline is in such a hurry to console him that she becomes quite reckless with regard to facts.

"Don't cry, dearie; do you want to make me cry too? I didn't mean what I said. I'm only going a little way off. I wasn't thinking of what I was saying when I said you were sending me away. See, Chubby, what's the use of all your gilt-edged paper with the two fat sheep in the corner, unless to write me a letter with. When you've written me only a few, and told me whether Berger and Bergerette are growing up, and how often you've forgotten to water my ferns, then you'll hear 'Ding-a-ling-a-ling,' at the bell, and you'll run downstairs and jump off the four bottom steps into my arms, and I'll be your horse all the way upstairs."

The sobs are abating now, but Chubby is only half convinced. He has climbed on to Pauline's lap, with a



glorious indifference to the lace and the orange-blossoms, and is holding her as if those childish hands could keep her from the path she has chosen to follow.

Now there is a sound of wheels below.

"Mademoiselle! madame, attend!" screams Fifine, running upstairs.

Pauline jumps up, and Chubby begins to cry again as he follows her to the door.

Downstairs there is much commotion. At the sound of the carriage wheels the cook and housemaid have rushed simultaneously to the front door.

To the cook, of a somewhat heated complexion, Pauline looks like a radiant vision as she descends the stairs. Cook clasps two hands, martyrs to suet and soda, as she exclaims to the housemaid—

"Oh my! don't she look just like one of them big beautiful images at chapel?"

Jane assents, but timorously. She is new to the place, and a girl of discernment. She cannot forget the expression of Madame Delaunay's face, walking swiftly with eyes bent on the ground towards the carriage.

One last wail from Chubby reached Pauline's ears as she drove away with her grandmother. She could not realise that this dream-like day was an ordinary work-a-day Thursday—bright, sunshiny, busy for the rest of the world. At this time she has not on other mornings finished her practising or filled her vases with flowers, yet though she has slept so late, the morning has seemed so long! Already her old life seems to have passed away, and she is standing on the threshold of her new one. She looks back—it is nearly all light. She peers forward—but she cannot see into the dark.

Pauline dares not look into her grandmother's mournful eyes. She puts a timid hand into madame's lap, but there is no response.

"It is too late," said madame. "You have done the hurt, but you cannot heal it."

"But you would have had me marry nobody," expostulated Pauline, as the church door loomed in front of them.

The driver is holding the carriage door open. Two or three passers-by are standing still to watch the bride walk into the empty church.



"Dare you to say it!" answered madame, as they went side by side up the steps. "I would have seen you marry yourself with another than he."

These are the last words that ring in Pauline Vyner's ears as she walks up the aisle and confronts George Drafton. From this moment, all through the ceremony, she is perfectly collected. George is alternately pale and flushed, but Pauline, for the time being, has quite lost the sense of her own identity. She feels as if she were dressed in somebody else's body, and were going through somebody else's part. There is an embarrassing pause when the clergyman demands, "Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Pauline is so obviously giving herself away, that the necessity of answering for her had not occurred to her grandmother. But madame must drain her bitter cup in full. She must step forward calmly, with all her heart crying out against it, and apparently of her own accord relinquish her granddaughter to George.

In a corner of the church sits Miss Gerofly. There are people who scent a marriage as vultures scent a battle. Not a detail escapes Miss Gerofly's rabid eyes. "As white! as white, my dear!" she says afterwards to Jamesina, to whose eager ears she carries a recital of the spectacle forthwith, "only a little tiny bit of colour, like the loveliest paint, in each cheek. And a train *that* long, caught back with real orange blossoms, tacked on to a fall of the most exquisite lace. As for Madame Delaunay, you'd have said she was at a funeral. No, her dress wasn't much: quite plain, a dark grey silk, the last colour I'd choose for a wedding. Mr. Drafton! oh yes! Well, he looked flurried. I didn't hear him say 'I will,' though I was keeping my hand to my ear to listen. Walking down the aisle he looked as pleased as a man who's just had a tooth out—you know that look, don't you? Mrs. Drafton didn't look like herself somehow. You'd have said she was walking in her sleep. They all got into the one carriage at the door—a big hired family coach, I should say—madame and Mrs. Drafton, and the clergyman and Mr. Drafton. I didn't like to show myself, you know. It was a whim, I'm told, of Mrs. Drafton's to keep her wedding-day a secret. I didn't see them



get in, but I saw them drive off in the direction of Beau-Séjour."

While the wedding party is absent, Fifine has laid violent hands upon Chubby. When they return, the little boy is standing on the steps dressed in his suit of black velvet and steel buttons. Were it not for the coincidence that the man of God is also a man of the world, so uncomfortable a quartette would of a surety never have sat down to so dainty a meal. George has given orders that the buggy shall be driven to the door an hour after the wedding is over. At the breakfast table Madame Delaunay takes her usual seat at its head. Pauline sits next to her husband. Chubby and the clergyman are opposite to her. She is aware, always in her own character, that somebody has called her Mrs. Drafton. She starts, but does not answer to the name. She sees that Fifine is putting a silver knife into her hand, and that the snowy cake has been pushed towards her to cut. She hears the clergyman's suave voice, addressed now to Madame Delaunay, now to George, with the sensation of there being cotton in her ears. She can hear, with a dim sense of being pleased at hearing it, that Chubby has asked for more cake.

She wonders at it vaguely for an instant. The cake in her own mouth is like the veriest sawdust, hard to swallow. But this is a part of the unreality. It is all unreal—all a singular dream. When her grandmother rises, she rises too and follows her quite mechanically upstairs. The ubiquitous Fifine is there before her, and the sombre dress is in readiness on the bed. George and the clergyman are left below—Chubby too, comforted by cake for all too short a space. George, looking out of the window eager for the appearance of the buggy, feels that some one has mounted on the chair beside him, and turning round, sees Chubby's face on a level with his own. The child has waited his opportunity. The clergyman's eyes are absorbed in critical contemplation of a copper-hued landscape, said to be a Claude. His back is turned to the light, and Chubby thinks that his own penetrating child voice will only reach George's ear.

"Pauline is my niece," he begins—he is panting from the double effects of the cake and the climb. "Hadn't



you got a niece all of your own? Why do you want to take my one away?"

His blue eyes are fixed upon George with the unabashed searching gaze of childhood as he asks the question.

"But she's my wife now, my little man; Mrs. Drafton, that's her name—your niece, Mrs. Drafton, do you hear? There's no more Pauline Vyner any longer, thank God!"

What an irrepressible ring of jubilation runs through every tone of George's voice. "She is mine; no one can take her from me!"—this has been the one predominant, overwhelming, crazy thought since he stood by her side at the altar. There is no room for pity. It must be a wrench to madame to part with her, but all girls must get husbands some day, or if they don't so much the worse for them. He is surprised to see the hatred in Chubby's face, half amused at it. "You're an old-fashioned little chap, if ever there was one. So you thought you were going to keep Pauline all to yourselves; did you?" He can hardly forbear chuckling, his triumph is so great.

"Never mind, my man; you be a good boy, and I'll have you over to stop with Pauline one of these days. I'll put you on top of a horse too; there's a chance for you, eh?"

"Pauline won't stop with you for always," says the child almost vindictively—he has ignored the amicable overtures in Mr. Drafton's reply. "She says she's got to go for a little bit. Then soon she'll come back."

He is clambering down from the chair very fast, that George may not see that he is fighting with fresh tears. He fights away the hands that would detain him, and runs out of the room. Only Berger and Bergerette in the dim drawing-room look stonily on at his abandonment of childish despair.

The buggy driving up to the door with a dash, George forgets his momentary vexation. Pauline has seen it coming too, and now for the first time since she entered the church does the sense of her own identity return to her—and she has but one moment left her, one moment to be filled with passionate appeals to her grandmother.

"Take pity, grandmère! I have done it for the best. Do smile only once! Do let me remember your face



smiling, grandmère dear. The thought of having made you suffer will be always with me. I cannot leave you looking like that. Grandmère—in pity!”

She breaks down, like Chubby, altogether. The convict gardener is labouring downstairs with the travelling trunk. George is heard cheerfully bustling about in the passage below.

“Now then! time’s up! Is there anything more to put into the trap?”

“He’s ca-calling me,” sobs Pauline, “and you wo-won’t smile!” She almost wails as she says the last word. Oh for ever so short a reprieve! She would have fallen at George’s feet if he would only have put off the departure until to-morrow.

Madame has been tutored in a school of suffering. She has more self-control than her granddaughter. All the anger, the bitterness, have gone. The pity only, the heartsickness, remain. It would be of no use now, while holding the girl close to her heart, to say, “You should have taken my counsel. You should have waited a little longer.” Madame refrains from such comfort. Desolate herself as she has never felt since her husband died, she soothes Pauline, though a very death-chill seems to have frozen her own power of feeling.

“*Allons, ma petite!* Some courage! You will open to me your heart in your letters, is it not? And retain well this, Pauline: Let all the world mock itself of you; come back to me when you shall not be happy.”

Nothing but the strength of madame’s love could have enabled her to make so supreme an effort at this moment of crowning suffering. She is almost disarmed by the strength of Pauline’s clinging embrace. She dare not speak again, and detaches Pauline’s arms from her neck. “Follow me below, my child,” she bids her gently; “they wait for you! Be quiet, my little one. I will smile to you when you depart!”

Madame finds George waiting in eager expectation at the foot of the staircase.

“She comes, Monsieur Shorge;” then hurriedly, “you will be good to her, is it not?”

It is terrible—the cost of self renunciation that enables madame to make this appeal to her enemy and her victor.

George answers from the bottom of his heart, “Never



you fear, madame! I know I'm a devilish lucky fellow, but I'll deserve her yet!"

Then Pauline, in the sombre dress, descends weeping—*vide* the "Handbook on the Etiquette of Courtship and Marriage," which ordains that the bride, bathed in tears, should throw herself into the arms of her mother, and bidding her home a fond adieu, should, &c., &c.

I don't know whether Pauline's convulsive sobs, that she tried so hard to control, were in exact conformity with the rules laid down in the above-named classic. Her eyes and nose had gone to daring lengths beyond the prescribed limits in which "the fair bride bathed in tears" should confine herself. She was not, indeed, sufficiently mindful of them to let down her veil, and kissed Fifine and shook hands with the other servants like a child who is going to a boarding-school. But the worst ordeal was to come. As she reached the hall door, Chubby rushed out upon her and almost pulled her down as he clung round her neck. He encircled her waist with his legs, and twisted himself about her body with the tenacity of despair.

"Take me with you, Pauline—take me and mother! Mr. Drafton, please let us come—please, please don't leave us behind! Don't, Pauline—don't go!"

His mournful cry of "Don't go! don't go!" sounds in Pauline's ears even after she is seated in the buggy by her husband's side, and he has pulled the apron over their knees. Childhood is wonderfully selfish compared with mature age. While Pauline gives one last look of agonised entreaty as George gathers up the reins, madame forces her suffering lips into the promised smile. It is rather a ghastly smile, but it is a smile, a token of peace and forgiveness. Then the buggy drives away, and Pauline knows that she has voluntarily left her home desolate. The thought of her grandmother returning to the empty room (Pauline has forgotten the existence of the clergyman) with no one but Chubby to console her—Chubby, who is most likely crying his heart out already—such a thought is almost too much for her. This abandonment of grief is an embarrassment to George. It gives him a queer sensation of pain and discomfort to see Pauline cry. "Cheer up, old woman!" he says heartily; "they'll get round after a bit."



"They won't," sobs Pauline. "Co-couldn't we go back to see?"

"Bless my soul! you'd have them in hysterics if you did. They were bad enough as it is. You make me feel quite wretched. Pauline! my love, my darling! for God's sake don't cry! You shall have the whole boiling to stop with you if you like."

Pauline's sobs begin to abate. She is already concocting a letter in her head to be written from the first resting-place.

"Yes, my beautiful wife," goes on George, "it's nobody's business to console you now but me—— I say, isn't this a devil to pull? We'll soon leave the miles behind us at this rate."

"I'll try to be cheerful by-and-by, Mr. Drafton," says Pauline, with piteous mouth. "Will you grant me the first favour I ask? Will you not want me to speak, or to notice anything on the road for half-an-hour? Think you've got a parcel by your side instead of me."

"I'm not going to think any impossibilities," says George. "If you like, though, I won't look at you again till your eyes are dry; will that do?" And in the silence that ensues, George has no resource left him but to whistle "Tommy Dodd."



## CHAPTER XI.

### *MRS. DRAFTON IN MELBOURNE.*

“Down, thou climbing sorrow!  
Thy element's below.”—SHAKSPERE.

JOSIAH CARP's smart residence at Toorah was known by the name of Wattle Villa, in reference probably to an enclosure of wattle trees close to the house. Once a year, in the very early spring, their inky surface was dotted with gold, like a black firmament on a starry night. Josiah liked the colour of gold, there being always a flavour of bullion about it to his mind. He was indifferent to green—such virgin green, for instance, as ushers in a European spring, deepening under every curious sun-beam that rests upon it—but it pleased him yearly to see the fluffy yellow balls bedeck his favourite trees. One would have said in the morning that a shower of golden shot had bespangled them in the night-time. Late in the autumn, too, an adventurous wattle would sometimes put forth some semi-gilded sprays—but sparsely, as if under protest. There was all the difference to be seen between gold spent with the open-handed lavishness of youth and the dull caution of age.

Next in favour to the wattle trees came the orangery, which Josiah had caused to be planted beneath his bedroom windows, that he might look down upon his oranges and watch them turn from green to gold. So impatient was he of this process, that if Midas could have been hired out at a reasonable figure to assist it, he would have clamoured to Bacchus to send the Phrygian king forthwith to his orangery.

Facing the north was an aviary, in which two golden pheasants trailed their glittering feathers in the dust and inspected each other's jewelled breastplates in the sunlight. When the wattle blossoms had had their day, and the oranges were tardy in ripening, Josiah would



plant himself in front of his aviary and make throaty noises to set his pheasants in movement.

He had need of some such diversion in his lack of human sympathy. The pheasants and the oranges could not combine against him, but in his relations to the world of men and women he was always on the defensive. The Fiji men, it is said, regard a person who does them a kindness as a fool or an enemy, and in this Mr. Carp was like a Fiji man, that his suspicions found a wide range.

"They won't get the better of me," was his constant idea. To find out what a man was "after," and what a woman was "up to," made up the sum total of such psychological speculations as he indulged in. Hence every new person was a new study in this particular direction.

Pauline's demeanour from the day of her arrival with her husband at Wattle Villa had been a fruitful source of mystification and sinister conjecture to Mr. Carp. Hitherto we have seen her only as she showed herself under the varying influence of all her contending feelings. Now the struggle was over. The day, at least, could bring no more repetition of the old discordant emotions; the inclination at war with the resolve; the heart-strings all pulling her one way—and her promise, her gratitude, George's ardent vehemence, pulling her the other. There was no longer a necessity for forcing herself to see in the best light possible every minutest action of George—no possible occasion for hurrying through the love-making period with unseemly haste, lest she should take back her own given pledge and tread upon the heart that would have been trampled upon actually for her sake. All that she had now to do was to adapt herself to the new conditions as best she might. The breaking-in was hard, nevertheless.

"A fine-bodied young thing; but law! whichever way you take it, quite a child," said Mr. Carp's housekeeper, in servant-hall conclave below stairs.

"There's somethink in it! I'll find 'er out before I've done with 'er. I'll find 'er out yet!" said Mr. Carp to himself in his smoking-room upstairs.

I record the servants' verdict first, because it was the most charitable.

With this object of finding her out in view, Josiah's



gleaming eyes followed the young wife about with a grudging, gathering admiration. If she raised her soft dark eyes from behind the panoply of silver on the breakfast table, she was sure to intercept a suspicious dart shooting straight out of the steel-coloured orbs opposite her. She rarely came out of her room without hearing a shuffling on the marble outside and seeing a shiny bald head precipitately ducking through a doorway. Her place of refuge was a small railed-in projection, which, opening from her bedroom window, and looking on the distant bay, reminded her ever so slightly of the balcony at Beau-Séjour. When George was in town, hovering round the precincts of Kirk's Bazaar, Pauline would lock her door, a whim never dreamed of before, and take her book and a chair to this balcony to await her husband's return.

Sitting there, as was her wont, one bright afternoon, her book, of which, it is to be feared, she read very little, slipped to the ground, and leaning her two arms on the balustrade in front of her, she rested her head upon them and fell into a fit of musing. Her face was hidden, but the sun made haste to fraternise with such locks in her brown head as responded to his greeting, and to warm the little bit of white neck which he could get at below the nape. She was going to reason with herself now, telling herself that her day-dreaming time was over. It must have been a curious process of reasoning that made a large tear fall with quite a splatter just in front of her, startling her into a sudden sense of shame. She had meant to review her position courageously and honestly, to trace out a line of conduct and force herself to adhere to it, to grasp the realities of her new life and see how best to face them, and she must needs begin by crying! She excused herself to herself on the plea of home-sickness—she had never been more than a week away from her grandmother and Chubby before—and set to work afresh to reason out her situation. And first of all came the question, "What had she to live for?"

Under her grandmother's roof, with Chubby's velvety arms about her neck, there had been the same luxurious risk in asking the question that a seeker for sensation might find in putting his head under a guillotine which



he knows to be fastened securely. There might have been no logical answer even then, it is true—the excitement of the speculation would have lost its fascination had there been such an answer at hand—but Chubby's laugh, madame's sometimes caressing eyes, were more satisfactory than logic. The question seemed quite another thing now. She had been happy even in asking it before, and happiness in existence solves for the time being its own riddle.

Pauline, you see, had never been taught to look as a matter of fact upon the possible adjustment hereafter of all things at sixes and sevens in the world. If she tried to carry her own identity beyond the grave, a conviction of utter incomprehensibility drove her back.

Her grandmother, as we have seen, belonged to the French philosophical school, and had instructed her in the different faiths held by different nations. Pauline had learned to hope—not to believe. But such hope seemed a slender reed to cling to in her new path. It is easy to hope when the present may be accepted as a gauge for the future, but even hope itself is sometimes a fine-weather friend. So she had nothing for it but to return to her first consideration of "What had she to live for?"

Well, to begin with, she had to live for George—George, who repeated to her every day of his life that he would die without her. What matter if the prospect of being shut up with George always frightened her at the outset? She must waive the question of her individual happiness, and never swerve from a few fixed resolves. A resolve that her grandmother and Chubby should be written to cheerfully and reassuringly, without a hint of her heart-aches when she thought of them. A resolve to set herself to work, come what might, and go like a machine through so much practising, so much work, so much reading, at stated hours of the day. A resolve to stifle by any means in her power futile regrets and repinings.

Once on a time her castles in Spain had been inhabited by the sort of misty, intangible heroes that go to make up a girl's innocent ideal—a sort of patchwork reflection of Sir Kenneth and Guy Livingstone grafted on to a perambulatory compendium of inexhaustible knowledge. How old it made her feel now to think of such a time! Her unbridal-like reflections led her at last to pity George,



whose exuberance of happiness would receive so severe a check if he could read her thoughts. Surely it will not mend matters to make two people miserable instead of one. Besides, she is not miserable; disappointment is not misery. And is she justified in being disappointed even? There had been no glamour upon George before his marriage that she should expect him to be different now. Strong in her last resolve that he shall find her ready to give him a smiling welcome on his return, she raised her head that the air might dry all traces of her tears, and looked at Melbourne stretched out in the distance, silently contrasting it with her favourite scene from Beau-Séjour. A grey cloud had hidden the sun and blackened all the dusty verdure in the foreground. It had darkened the waters in the bay, and thrown a gloom on the gloomy mass of blue-stone which Pauline recognised as St. Patrick's Cathedral. While her eyes were still travelling over the spires, she heard a "cooey" from below, and at the same instant George threw a small orange over the balustrade into her lap. She ran to unlock the bedroom door and get rid of her solemn expression while he was coming upstairs.

He entered noisily, kissing his wife effusively as usual. "And now, my old woman," he said, walking up to the glass and pulling down his waistcoat, "I want you to dress up and give the people a treat. There's just time to catch the five-to-four train from South Yarra if you look alive."

"I'd like to come; but won't I do as I am, George?"

She stands before him for approval in her dress of softest grey. A narrow blue riband run through her cross band linen collar, and fastening her cuffs at the wrist, saves it from being Quakerish.

"I'll put on my little black velvet jacket, the one you like, you know, and my grey felt hat, and I'm sure I'll do then."

"That's always the way with you" replied her husband, with an implied irritation in his tone. "Whenever I want you to come out a swell, it's 'Won't I do as I am?' You just do as I tell you, and we'll go straight off to town and 'do the block.' If you don't take the shine out of some of them, I'll hand over my money."

Pauline turns away, and contemplates without much good-will the different triumphs of Fifine's skill hanging



in her wardrobe. She is not at all indifferent to her pretty dresses, nor to the pleasure of being admired in them, but to give a zest to the wearing of a pretty dress there must be somebody to please. Pauline knows that in all the throng before whom she must parade her violet silk this same afternoon there will be nobody about whose approval she cares. She wonders within herself sometimes at the sudden apathy that seems to have overcome her regarding these new faces and surroundings.

"By-the-bye, Pauline," says George, between the intervals of brushing down his cut-away coat, "the Sydney mail's in. I believe I've got a letter for you somewhere or other."

"Oh, George!" the violet silk tumbles on the floor, and two white outstretched arms are held forth for her letter.

"Where the devil have I put it!" ejaculates George, fumbling in all his pockets, while Pauline stands anxiously by.

"Don't keep me waiting so long, pray!" she pleads; "you make me feel like the lion before he's fed."

"Here you are," exclaims George at last, pulling an ornamental gilt-edged envelope, strangely blurred, from his trousers pocket. "And look here, Pauline! I wish you'd write over to your people and tell them to direct the kid's letters for him. You'll be the laughing-stock of the servants, I tell you!"

Pauline's eyes meanwhile are moist with tenderness as she follows the variations of Chubby's excursive upstrokes along the blotted page.

"I want you to come back; I want you not to stop so long away. I want you to make the postman tell me what day you will come back."

This, under hazardous orthographical flights, is the burden of Chubby's epistle. Pauline knows every word by heart before she answers George. Then, while she is arraying herself in the violet silk, she remarks with a freezing intonation—

"I'm sorry the servants should be so sensitive on the point of caligraphy. Would it not be worth your while to suggest their giving a few hints to your uncle when he leaves his written directions on the slate in the hall?"

George cannot reply ill-temperedly. He is watching the stages of progress in the career of the violet silk.



The possibility of even feeling ill-tempered with a wife who has such capabilities of showing off a dress!

He bursts out laughing at her dignity.

"There you go! If I want to get your blood up, I've only to pass a remark about Chubby! I only hope you'll stick up for your husband the same; but after all, who could be in a scot with you?"

Pauline cuts short his endearments by a reminder of the time, and together they pass out through the garden on their way to the railway station.

It is possible that the much dreaded future would have put on quite a new aspect for her had George shown a little more power of adaptability to her tastes. If, in this early stage of their married life, he had told her to put on her hat and come with him to see the shop windows in town, and if on their reaching Melbourne he had turned in, it is hard to say where—public places of interest are not as yet too profusely scattered over Melbourne—but anywhere, to the public library, the picture gallery—a music-shop even, and there shown himself not utterly estranged to all the interests she had moved among from her childhood, part of the blank would at least have been filled up. But George was much too intent upon displaying his prize to consider whether the prize came willingly.

Collins Street was crowded as they walked slowly up it; a whole line of carriages was drawn up before Alston & Brown's, and the same people passed backwards and forwards interminably. George took special care to greet everybody when Pauline was by his side. He bombarded her with directions as they passed up the street. "Look across the road, quick! There's O. bowing to us! Hold hard, Pauline! look in at this window a moment. I want D. to see you. Good gracious me!" in a tone of disgust, "why didn't you bow to Cuttem?"

"Was that Mr. Cuttem?" says Pauline blandly. "But I don't know him."

"Don't know him! and I introduced you to him the other day! He's an awful particular chap that way. Look sharp! here's Shakem coming. He's a Melbourne club fellow. I pilled him for a fiver last time I was in town."



These and other disjointed scraps of information were poured out between the intervals of recognition. Pauline knew who was running a horse "on the quiet," who spent a thousand a year on her dress, who was "sticking up" to an heiress, and as soon as she knew all these facts she forgot them.

When they had sauntered up to the corner of Queen Street for the second time, George paused, and apparently cogitated with himself before speaking.

"I say, Pauline, I've a jolly good mind to take you round to Kirk's Bazaar just for a minute. You won't mind, will you? There's no sale on just now, I think, and I won't keep you long. I want you to see a two-year-old I bought there this morning—a Panic, mind you—a regular 'plum.' I've engaged a sort of man-of-war's man to take him up to the station. You never saw such a cure in your life."

Pauline expresses her willingness to go wherever George pleases, and accompanies him to the horse-yards at the upper end of Bourke Street. Now she is for the first time made aware of the centaur-like existence of some of her fellow-creatures. Men with a peculiar kind of check running through their waist-coats are passing in and out, and a groom with turned-up shirt-sleeves is hosing a horse in the back of the yard.

In the pride of his purchase George almost forgets to note whether any one is looking at his wife. He directs that the animal shall be walked up and down in front of him.

"For a youngster," he explains to Pauline, "he's got some of the most remarkable points I ever saw. But then his was an imported dam, and Panic's the grandest sire in the colonies. This is between ourselves, you know, but I reckon I've as good a show of winning a Melbourne Cup with him one of these days as any man in the country."

It is all so strange to Pauline. She dares not risk a surmise, lest George should laugh at her ignorance before every one in the yard. She remarks naively that it is a pretty colour and has a pretty mane, and then her eyes are caught by the man who is holding it—a man so distinct from the horsey type surrounding him that the incongruity of his position strikes even her



as ridiculous. A heavy, slouching man, in a greasily dark suit, with cheeks that reminded Pauline of an inflated suet pudding, and two eyes like currants very much in the background. For the rest—all hair uncombed, shaggy, like rusty black yarn.

"Avast there, my pretty one," he said hoarsely, as the colt planted its hoof on his foot; "you ain't got your sailin' directions clear, my pet, or you wouldn't be fallin' foul of an old hulk like me!"

He spoke with the insinuating gruffness of the fox in Grimm's tales who has to swallow a lump of chalk before he can make the little kids at home by themselves believe that he is the old goat, their mother.

"You'll have to look well after the colt, my man, going up in the train," remarks George warningly; "I'll come and settle it with you to-morrow morning. If you bring him up all right, I daresay I'll find a job for you on the station too; and if you want me at any time, you just inquire at the office of Messrs. Cavil & Carp, Flinders Lane—Mr. Josiah Carp, you know—that's my uncle!"

The man's currant eyes twinkle. "Bless your heart, I've known Carp this many a year—sober, steady man, Carp"—the currants begin to disappear—"open-'anded, free-spoken man—eh?"—the currants threaten to go in altogether.

George is undecided whether to curse the man's impudence or to laugh at him, but the currants having come out again, and beaming with an air of fatherly regard upon Pauline, he is appeased.

"Pulver, this lady is Mrs. Drafton," says George with emphasis.

Pulver, with a preternaturally grave expression, draws one leg behind another, as if he were going to curtsy, and suddenly pulls forward his shaggy head by dragging at the handiest piece of tow dependent from his forehead.

But it is neither the grotesque attitude nor the travestied bow which arrests Pauline's attention. It is the simple earnest look of dog-like devotion that he sends her from his currant eyes. And though she is not so forlorn as to think that she may ever have need of Pulver's friendship, she is less depressed on leaving the yard than on entering it.



"I daresay he knows my father's ship," she says when they have left the yards; "I should like to ask him about that.—Shall I see him again at Rubria, George?"

"Like enough, my darling. But he's rather a rough-looking customer for you to be seen talking to. Now I've got that yearling on my mind, I won't rest till I'm back. Besides, I must have a good buck in at my work. What do you say to it if we make a start with the buggy to-morrow?"

"Just as you like, George" (absently).

"Just as *I* like!" repeats George; "that's a good one, Pauline! You were for giving me too little of my own way before we were married, and dash it if you've got a will of your own at all now. Aren't you on the tenter-hooks to see your home?"

"Yes, I shall be glad to go; and do you know," lowering her voice, "your uncle gives me the nightmare."

"Oh, he's an old beast! I've taken stock of him once or twice when he was looking at you. My word, Pauline, if I thought he'd said a syllable to vex you, I'd make it hot for him, I tell you!"

"He's never said a word to vex me—only"—she hesitates.

"Only what?" repeats her husband impatiently. "Out with it!"

"Only—I don't like him."

Pauline does not like to own that Josiah's looks alarm her. He glares at her when the Sydney mail comes in with an expression which makes her cold. Pursuing his plan of finding her out, he has drawn his own deductions from the sudden lighting up of her face when her letters are brought into the room. How indeed should such a nature as Mr. Carp's comprehend that the minute French handwriting of a grandmother, and the sprawling address of a very little boy, have power to make her lips quiver before she opens the envelopes?

As they leave the South Yarra train, families in clusters pour out of the carriages, and parties of five or six set off to their homes in company. Pauline, with her husband by her side, a husband to whom she is as the very heart's blood and soul, envies these happy people bound by a family communion of interests and sympathies.



What then of all her resolves—her self-tutoring? She is still so young. There is time for her to change her present state of mind a hundred times over in the next few years. Let her take the hour, not the day only, as it comes. What excuse can she plead for restless discontent? Is she not going back to Wattle Villa, where Mr. Carp is to give a dinner-party the same evening; and has not George bought a two-year-old that very morning that is to win a Melbourne Cup?



## CHAPTER XII.

### *MR. CARP AT HOME.*

"Where more is meant than meets the ear."

—MILTON.

MR. CARP invited his friends without regard to their possible assimilation. It was his habit to entertain them once a month in alphabetical order, ignoring all political differences between the B's, or the charitable sentiments entertained towards each other by such philanthropists as the C's. He acknowledged as his acquaintances only such people as were rich and respectable enough to invite him in return, and to preserve the tone of dull mediocrity pervading the Wattle Villa dinner-parties. Josiah's suspicious glance would have been directed uneasily at any guest whose conversational or musical powers were of a quality to stop the babble of commonplace talk. He held in something like contempt any display that bordered on the professional. The artist world was not respectable: people who would give you a crown's worth of emotion at any time you were willing to pay for it were not to be spoken of in a breath with people who advanced the world's interests by selling wool and speculating in sugars. George, remembering the dreary nature of his uncle's entertainments, prepared his wife for an evening of suppressed yawning. He was waiting to take her downstairs, looking, as it seemed to Pauline, with his slight muscular figure encased in the orthodox black, and his fair moustache setting off his sunburnt skin, better than she had ever seen him look before. She acknowledged to herself that it was a proof of the triviality of her nature that this slight fact should make her lighter-hearted for the instant, and more animated in the selection of the flowers for her hair.



She had despoiled her dress of all its bridal bravery. Fifine's studied arrangement of Brussels lace was packed away, and she had brought in only some scarlet geranium, still flowering on a hedge round the orangery, to relieve the dead white of her dress. Her lips, like another geranium, a shade more crimson in hue, set off the clear pallor of her face as the flowers set off the dull ivory of her dress. Her only ornaments were of dead gold, bought for her by George in emulation of Jamesina's, and the only sparkle about her person gleamed from the heavy coronal of plaited hair that crowned her small head. George felt that to make his entry into his uncle's drawing-room with this queenly figure by his side was atonement sufficient for bygone penitential evenings in his early youth—evenings before he had worn tail-coats, and his uncle had instructed the butler in an undertone not to fill Master George's glass with champagne, evenings when the tail-coats had induced a greater feeling of constraint than before, evenings when he had found no resource against the dulness but to laugh saturninely at his uncle's propositions in his sleeve. He almost trembled with exultation as he hurried his wife downstairs and whispered his approbation in her ear. "You'll put a set on them, my old woman! Keep your head well up, that's all."

His anticipations were in nowise disappointed. The involuntary rustling of drapery and turning of heads, as Pauline walked into the room, were as intoxicating music to George. He could see, after she was seated, that the curiosity at war with good-breeding found vent in glances from all sides in her direction, and he had the triumph of stopping half way a furtive stare from Josiah's hard eyes.

Pauline, knowing nobody as yet, and keeping even Beau-Séjour in the background while she took in the details of the scene, made a hundred reflections in the course of a minute. The prevailing hue of the Wattle Villa drawing-room was yellow; there was nothing to link it with that dreamy world of imagination suggested by the drawing-room in her own home. There was more gilt frame-work than picture. An upholsterer's taste had crowded every novelty to sit upon or lounge upon into the oblong room, had gilded the cornices, and turned the grate into bars of gold, and laid on the floor a carpet scattered



with autumn leaves. Still it was pretty, Pauline thought; it was a sort of material incarnation of Josiah's money-making spirit. With her odd faculty for applying quotations, apt or inapt, a line telling her that the "trail of the serpent was over them all" ran in her head while she was making her mental comments. From the furniture to the guests! Pauline saw bland prosperity stamped on every face—on good-natured, rotund mammas; on slim misses, embedded in flounces; on flourishing papas, waiting with such an air of affability to reply to the first remark addressed to their ears, that no one would suspect them of having made their wives cry on the way to the dinner-party.

Her attention was next drawn to Mr. Carp himself. She felt that there must be a lurid fire burning somewhere in that ample body; it flickered beneath his bald head, and gave such an uncomfortable lustre to his eyes, that Pauline could think of nothing but the wolf in Red Riding Hood when she looked at him.

She noticed that he was very polite to his guests, saying, "'Ow do you do!" "'Ope you're well!" alternately, as they filed into the room. What more she might have thought of this nature was interrupted by the advent of a gentleman whom Mr. Carp brought up and formally introduced to her as Mr. Pippin. "And I'll leave you under 'is wing!" said Josiah, implying thereby that Mr. Pippin was to take her in to dinner.

The conjunction of the name with the man caused Pauline to drop hastily the two dark eyes she had raised while the introduction was going on. Mr. Pippin was so fresh-coloured, that on the shady side of forty his cheeks had a fixed rosiness like those of an overgrown boy. Pauline's long lashes almost touched her cheek as he sat by her side. She would not for worlds have betrayed the treacherous mirth that was dancing in their dark depths. The rosy-cheeked Mr. Pippin was compassionate. He had failed to catch Pauline's name, and saw in the young bride a shy girl, making perhaps her first appearance at a grown-up dinner-party. But Mr. Pippin would be nothing loth to reassure her. From a bachelor's point of view he was accustomed to look upon very young, very artless girls, as sufficiently charming to look at. It was a pity, Mr. Pippin thought, that one should be constrained to



talk to them. He prefaced his remarks to women of all ages by "Will you allow me say"—and then said it. His charitable designs upon Pauline could not be carried out until he had given her his arm and followed the stream of people making for the dining-room. He found himself installed by her side under the overshadowing glory of a massive gold *épergne*, presented to Josiah as chairman of the Society for the Furtherance of Public Morality. George, just opposite, in the neighbourhood of one of those monied young ladies whom his uncle had designated as being still in the market, chafed at the intrusion of the *épergne*, because he was obliged to look round it when he wanted to see his wife. When his soup-plate had been removed Mr. Pippin cleared his throat.

"Will you permit me to ask, miss—ahem—ahem—whether this is your first visit to Melbourne? I believe I gathered from Mr. Carp's words that you are a resident of Sydney."

Pauline looks bravely up beyond the rosy cheeks to the good-natured twinkling eyes.

"Yes; I have lived in Sydney all my life so far."

"Which you will allow me to observe," rejoins Mr. Pippin gallantly, "cannot have extended over a very alarming period of time. Am I mistaken in supposing that your visit is one of pleasure purely, or have the superior attractions of our seminaries influenced your motives?"

Pauline's laughter at this remark brings George's head round from behind the *épergne* as if she were a baby and he were playing at Bo-peep with her across the table.

"Forgive me for laughing, please, but do you mean you think I am at school?"

She cannot keep her lips in order. They part over her small row of narrow white teeth quite against her will.

Mr. Pippin feels at a disadvantage.

"I had inferred something of the sort; but if I have your permission to—to—retract my words, I will do so at once. At least," he adds, looking again at her child-like eyes, "you will allow me to ask what there is so *outré* in my conjecture?"

"Nothing—only that I'm married," says Pauline, suddenly grown solemn again.

The rosy-cheeked man starts.



"I beg your pardon—I am sure—I could hardly suppose—— May I venture once again to inquire your name?"

"Pauline—that is, Mrs. Drafton, I mean," she replies, stifling a sigh.

Mr. Pippin peers round the *épergne*. "And that is Mr. Drafton opposite?"

"That is Mr. Drafton opposite."

The rosy-cheeked man relapses into silence.

Broken sentences from different parts of the table reach Pauline's ears in disconnected order. George is warming to his subject with a grizzled man on the other side of him.

"As far as acting on the square's concerned," Pauline hears him say, "you don't find it carried out more in one line than another. You're just as likely to lose your money backing any one of those pedestrians as if you put it on a horse. It's easier managed, don't you see? A man can pull himself up better than his horse, you know!" and the grizzled man is politely assenting.

Then Pauline turns her eyes to the head of the table, but turns them away discomfited when she finds that Josiah is looking at her. Mr. Pippin, having taken his time to recover from the shock of hearing that the young girl he compassionated is married, shows symptoms of becoming communicative for a second time.

"And what, may I ask, are your impressions of Melbourne?"

"I can hardly say," answers Pauline, as seriously as if it were a matter which had caused her some inward wrestling already. "I know what I don't like about it, but I don't know that I've found out what I do like—yet."

Mr. Pippin feels that she has smoothed the way for another question. "Will you allow me to beg that you will tell me what is distasteful to you in our metropolis. I shall then be emboldened to hope that you regard with a favourable eye whatever you may omit to mention—of course from a purely negative point of view."

"Well then, I don't like—I forget what it is called—oh, the Block; and I don't like the corner of Bourke Street, opposite the post-office; and I don't like any of



the streets—much—when I am in them; and I don't like Melbourne at all except from the verandah of his house upstairs."

"That last clause is very sweeping," remarks the rosy-cheeked gentleman drily. "Will you enlighten me as to your objections to the 'Block' and the unfortunate corner of Bourke Street?"

"There would be no objection to the Block," she says gravely, "if it were not for the people. Some of the shops are splendid; and don't you agree with me about the Bourke Street corner? It seems to be as full of all sorts of out-at-elbows, down-in-the-world men, as Collins Street is of people of another sort."

"Both classes are idlers," remarks Mr. Pippin shortly.

"Yes"—hesitatingly—"but idleness in tatters is so unjustifiable. I should like to be absolute for a little bit, and march off every man that takes up his stand opposite the post-office!"

"And where would you march him to?" asks the rosy-cheeked man, amused.

"To all those dreary wastes between Emerald Hill and Melbourne, or to those swamps near the railway station. I would not have so many idle people even helping to breathe the air about Melbourne while there was so much to be done."

"I see," said Mr. Pippin soothingly, "you have strong opinions on the subject of the consumer who is not a producer. Well, as, unfortunately for this struggling generation, we men are too obtuse or too wide-awake to allow your sex to legislate for us, you must make your husband go into Parliament and act as your mouthpiece. I shall obliterate myself on the occasion of his speeches, being convinced that I am listening to you by proxy."

"Mr. Carp is in Parliament," says Pauline irrelevantly.

"Yes," replies Mr. Pippin, glancing at her curiously.

Their glances met. Not another word was exchanged on the subject of Josiah's oratorical powers, but each understood the other. Then Mr. Pippin proceeded to explain to her what we have all heard before—that there is such a thing as liberty of the subject; that if men will not work to put bread into their own mouths, they cannot be compelled to do so; that sooner or later



they will be taken up—not as Pauline proposes—for standing in ragged clothes opposite the post-office, but for standing anywhere and doing nothing; and that when they are taken up, they will have no choice given them but that of working before they can eat. To all of which Pauline, dallying with game and ice, listens attentively, until Mr. Pippin forgets to ask her permission to say what he is going to say, and George opposite looks round the *épergne* and wonders. There being no representative lady to do the honours of the house, the matron on Josiah's right hand looks mysteriously at the matron on his left, and a general uprising of the fair sex follows, Mr. Pippin much disconcerted at being cut short in a disquisition on John Stuart Mill. Pauline feels very much alone in the drawing-room among all these strange ladies. She is thankful when a large, fair, good-natured woman crosses over to the sofa where she is sitting and takes up a place by her side.

"It is too bad of Mr. Carp," remarks the large woman heartily, "not to let his friends know you were here, Mrs. Drafton. I'm sure you'd have been innundated with callers. How much longer are you to stay in town?"

"Only till to-morrow, I think; my husband says he has been too long away from the station already."

"Ah, indeed! Do you know anything of station life yourself?"

"Nothing at all; but I have made up my mind to like it."

"I'm afraid that's much the same thing as making up your mind to like going to sea before you've ever been on it. But it all depends. When I first went to the bush, straight out from home, too—we hadn't anything better than a slab hut to live in; there wasn't a servant to be got for love or money—every one was gold mad—and I just had to turn to and do the cooking and washing—and nurse my baby too into the bargain."

"Oh, did you really! And weren't you at all unhappy?"

Pauline regards the large, fair, jewelled hands, the smooth, sleek skin, and imagines with difficulty this dignified woman on her knees with a scrubbing-brush, or



standing before a wash-tub wringing out her husband's shirts.

"Well, it wasn't pleasant, of course," laughs her friend, "but it was a good thing if there was nothing worse than hard work to be afraid of. You know you were never sure of the blacks in those days. Now you'll find it all very different up at Rubria. *We* say the squatters don't know what it means to rough it now-a-days; and yet, my dear," with a sudden tenderness, as she looked again at the soft young face turned towards her, "I don't know but what you may find it dull sometimes too. Now, don't you think me forward, but if ever you want to come to town for a bit without your husband—to do some shopping, maybe, or have a change, there's no telling—mind you come to me! And if you feel lonely, or want a piece of an old matron's experience, I'd be so glad if you'd write to me. I've got daughters of my own too. You look about the same age as my eldest, but dear me, I keep her in the nursery still."

The stout lady laughed, with the soft pleasant laugh of good-hearted, kindly-natured fat people.

Such offers as hers, such glances as Pulver's, such cut-and-dried conversation even as Mr. Pippin's, were all crumbs of comfort to poor anxious Pauline. She wanted everybody's good-will. She would have liked to cry out to this motherly woman, and lay bare the trouble that stared at her in the morning, and lay by her in the night-time, like the chill ghost that thrust Rupert from the arms of the fair Isabel. But such trouble as hers must never be admitted. She must put it on one side even in her communings with herself.

Here are the gentlemen following each other in from the dining-room. Her stout lady friend has been decoyed to the other end of the room before Pauline has had time to thank her, and George, with an unmistakable stamp of after-dinner elation on his fair flushed face, is making his way to the sofa.

"Pauline," he whispers—not unsteadily, be it remarked; George never forgets himself so far—but in a whisper he would not have assumed if he had not dined, "you *are* a sider! What on earth was that fellow talking to you about all dinner-time?"

"I can't tell it you all just now," says Pauline



nervously, unconsciously freeing her skirts from his neighbourhood; "principally about useless mouths, I think, and John Stuart Mill, and the people at the corner of Bourke Street."

"Bourke Street!" cries George, his thoughts instantly reverting to his yearling. "I hope to goodness, Pauline, you had the savey to say nothing about going to Kirk's Bazaar! It's very bad form, I assure you, for a lady to be seen stravaging about to such places!"

"No, no! we weren't talking about ourselves at all. Do sit somewhere else, please, George! You, who care so much about what people think."

"Think! they'll only think we're a little spooney—that's all. Look here, Pauline, am I a man or a mouse?"

"Oh, pray, George, don't terrify me! I don't understand you, truly. Here's your uncle coming to speak to me."

Josiah's chill eyes were like a breath of the cold south wind on George's heated forehead. They gleamed down for an instant on the young couple before their owner spoke, and then they rested upon George.

"'Ere you, George! don't you see Miss Smith's waiting to have the leaves of 'er music turned over?"

Miss Smith was in point of fact seated on the music-stool pensively taking off her quondong bracelets, preparatory to a vigorous execution of "Home sweet home," with variations.

At certain moments George succumbed to the old sense of subserviency to his uncle. This was one of these moments. He went like a man who has been magnetised to do duty at the piano. Josiah, thrusting himself into his place, took a rapid survey of his guests. Men holding their cups of coffee in their hands were talking to each other or bending over a lady's chair. Two recently-betrothed lovers were pretending to look at an album of celebrated characters. Mr. Pippin was hovering round the sofa occupied by Mr. Carp and Pauline. Pauline sits motionless, with sad, downcast eyes. The fault must be partly in herself after all. If she is prepared that George's words should jar upon her, the discord must perforce follow. Her very brain suffers when he will not chime in with her mood. But



does she chime in with his? He has a greater wealth of love at his disposal, that he should lavish it upon a being who shrinks away, as she has just done, at his approach.

Josiah breaks in upon her meditations harshly.

"That 'usband of yours 'as a weak 'ead, Mrs. D." He stares fiercely at her, as watching for the effect of his remark. Not a movement of the eyelids betrays that she has heard him.

"And he's too much addicted to bettin'," continues Josiah, determined to stretch her still farther on the embers. "You'll see he won't stop till he's beggared himself. You never know the well's run dry till there's no more water to be got out of it. I've advised 'im for the best. You'll 'ave to take 'im in 'and now."

Pauline take him in hand! In the bitterness of her heart she could almost laugh at the proposition. A household darling—fresh from the flower-scented, briny air of peaceful Beau-Séjour, as innocent of the world and its ways as a young pullet that has not yet made the tour of the poultry-yard—is it for her to bring to bear her dreams for the regeneration of humanity upon practical, demonstrative, self-satisfied George? What appropriateness would there be in obtruding the problems she has conned over with her grandmother, the rose-coloured flights of fancy she has indulged in with Chubby, upon her husband? If he cannot take the lead in worldly matters, then she is indeed a rudderless, unpiloted vessel, buffeted about without hope of anchorage. Josiah sees her breast heave under the weight of this new terror.

"Don't you tell your 'usband what I've been saying of to you. But you keep him off the turf, that's my advice; and you rely upon it, Mrs. D., you've always got a friend in me."

Simple words these to draw from Pauline a mute prayer that Heaven will preserve her from Josiah's friendship. But there is such a thing even in a guileless nature as an intuitive recognition of evil, whether the evil be latent or otherwise. Pauline does not even reason about her aversion to Mr. Carp. It is instinctive, and there is no more to be said. Mr. Pippin never has the satisfaction of talking about John Stuart Mill



a second time. Pauline is called to the piano in her turn, and even Josiah is fain to forgive her for interrupting a conversation about the drought when he hears her sing. There is not much power, but a great measure of sweet tunefulness in her voice. George is always lifted out of himself at the sound. With her fingers on the keys of the instrument, and her own notes ringing in her ears, Wattle Villa melts away like an oppressive dream. She is back in the Beau-Séjour drawing-room, singing to her grandmother in the twilight; the old lady is beating time to "Le Soleil de ma Bretagne" with her knitting pins, and Chubby's rosy face is looking up from the Ollendorff before him on the hearthrug. Poor Pauline! the bitterest pang of all is to know that she has been her own undoing.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### *PAULINE'S FATHER REAPPEARS UPON THE SCENE.*

"What wind hath blown him hither?"—MILTON.

THE sun was tardy one autumn morning in rising over the Murray plains. Nature and a solitary selector's horse bestirred themselves to show him that it was time to be up and doing. His scouts, the rosy tipped clouds, performed a series of gorgeous dissolving views for the solitary selector's benefit—the magpies were chanting their tuneful orisons for the selector's ears alone—and the cackling jackasses were laughing in discordant chorus (like the demons in *Rip Van Winkle*), all on the selector's behoof. But the selector heeded neither spectacle nor concert. The inquisitive magpies could see nothing beneath his pulled down wide-awake but a light brown beard, peppered here and there by drab-coloured hairs, and the tip of an aristocratic nose tweaked by the chill morning air into a bloodless white. He was so bolstered up in his hairy ulster, that the magpies could not decide whether he was a slim man in a stout overcoat or a stout man in a slim overcoat. Seated in the front of his cart, his back supported by various knobby projections—say the legs of a kitchen table, for instance—that bulged out from beneath the tarpaulin covering behind him, he had the preoccupied air of a man whose relations with himself are of too unsatisfactory a nature to leave room for any musings as to his relations with the world outside of him; only, on stroking his beard, the moisture that it left on a hand which was a worthy competitor for the palm of whiteness with his nose, caused him to push back his wide-awake suddenly and look across the unbroken grey plain at the yellow rim of sun, beginning its upward climb with an air of being master of the situation.



There was nothing in that look to answer to the selector's expectations. The higher the sun climbed, the more fiercely he shone. As for the shrivelled brown pasturage upon which he was glaring, it was as much like the soft green grass that it ought to have been as a withered old crone is like a round peach-coloured girl. The selector sighed therefore, and looked a second time across the plain—not hopefully now, but despondingly. In lowering his eyes he became aware of an object in the distance that interposed its black outline between himself and the sun. There were no tree stumps on the plain—it was a wide dingy level; moreover the selector, still watching intently, saw that the object moved. He stood up in his cart shading his eyes with his white fingers, and making up his mind that he knew what he was looking at. A row of native companions, of course, standing on one leg—as is their wont—like recruits going to drill. The “of course” became a “perhaps” as the selector drew nearer. Well, a cluster of friendly emus, no doubt, viciously and incontinently pecking at the bare earth, as is their wont to. But as the cart advanced the selector discarded this supposition likewise. He had it now. Some Murray blacks, to be sure, carousing in the vicinity of a township. The selector gave it up after this, and pricked up his steed like the knights of old, until the legs of the kitchen table threatened to kick a hole through the tarpaulin. He pulled up only when he was close to the object that had mystified him. A buggy in the undignified dilemma of resting on three wheels, like a dog with his hind leg doubled up, turned out to be the Murray black of his last conjecture—his native companions were two hobbled horses making aimless jumps in their search after a breakfast—and his wandering emu was a mountainous confusion of buggy cushions, shawls, wraps, and opossum rugs.

The selector drew cautiously nearer to reconnoitre. He concluded that somebody had come to grief, and pulling up his apathetic horse, fastened the reins with somewhat inexperienced fingers, and walked delicately, like Agag, to the afore-mentioned mountain of rugs. Two human heads protruded therefrom. A man's, tied tightly up in a white handkerchief, which left visible only some



sandy coloured beard and the end of a sunburnt nose—a woman's, of which all that the selector could see was a dishevelled mass of dusky twisted hair and part of a clear white forehead streaked with blue on the temple like a statue. Before the selector had time to consider what he must do, or rightly to take in the position of affairs at all, this dusky head moved round. Two dark sleepy eyes, coloured like the hair, opened full upon him, and a voice, speaking as if in continuation of a worrying dream, said anxiously and indistinctly, "Father!" The selector started as if the voice had said "Stand," and he had seen a pistol pointed at his head. The eyes meanwhile were opening wider. The look of dazed recognition had turned into a look of half terrified and hopeless bewilderment. The selector felt that it was a time for action.

"Hush!" he said, stooping right over her, and laying a warning hand on her shoulder; then in a hurried whisper breathed into her ear, "You must not know me, mind! I can't explain here! Tell me quickly, what are you doing here?"

"That is my husband," whispered Pauline.

An instant after George awoke with an impression of having dreamed the most exasperating and utterly idiotic dream that a sane man could possibly dream in his position and under the present circumstances. He had dreamed that here, in this uninhabited wild, a strange man had kissed his wife as she lay by his side. He sat up by-and-by, with the handkerchief still tied round his head, the creases not smoothed out of his sleepy face, and stared with dulled eyes at his wife. She had crept from under the rugs with the uncomfortable feeling that her dress had grown to her back, and was kneeling by his side with the tumbled coil of hair in her two hands, ruefully trying to smooth out the tangles with her back comb. But her eyes all the time were so wild, so abstracted, that George bethought him of his dream. He tugged at the knot under his chin, frowning threateningly at it in his efforts to pull it asunder while he was speaking.

"How did you sleep, old girl? I'll tell you what, I've a most confounded headache. I believe there were a dozen stones under my shoulder blades at least; and



to cap all, I had a devil of a dream just as I was waking up."

"What was it?" Pauline asks, bringing her hair over her face with a jerk, and looking like a wig-block the while.

"You'll laugh at me when I tell you. I dreamed a fellow—I couldn't see his face, you know—came right up and gave you a kiss under my very nose! Did you ever hear such a thing?"

Pauline is silent. She is too frightened to speak. If her father cannot disclose his name, it was cruel, it was rash to kiss her, and any catastrophe might ensue. She labours away with trembling fingers at the hair that veils her eyes.

Luckily the knot in George's improvised nightcap diverts his thoughts. He loses patience with it at last, and tears it off with a minute portion of his beard, whereat he utters an exclamation Pauline does not catch. Then he jumps to his feet and utters another exclamation, but this one is milder than the last.

"Why, look there, Pauline! Good gracious me! I say, look there! What do you think? We're not alone; there's a fellow in a cart making tracks for us."

For the selector, apparently sprung from the ground, and freshly appearing on the scene, is pulling up his horse near the buggy, and now advances towards George on foot.

"Can I be of any assistance?" asks the stranger, taking off his hat to Pauline, and addressing himself to her husband. "You have had an accident, I see," he indicates with his hand the humiliated buggy, looking so ridiculously ready for a start and so unable to accomplish it.

George takes some time to assure himself that this is not another phase of his dream.

"Some broken-down swell, you bet," he says to himself; then aloud, "Well, thank you; we had a sort of smash up last night. The cap of the wheel fell off in the dark, and the wheel broke; we all but had a capsize. I was pushing on for the township, you see, but there was nothing for it but to camp down where we were. It's nothing to me, you know, but it's rather rough upon the wife."

He looks round at Pauline, sticking her comb into the smoothed-out twisted-up coil.



The selector's eyes follow George's, and the selector bows for the second time.

The poor child was trembling visibly with excitement and apprehension. She had been indifferent enough to her father last time she had seen him, still a little girl, at Beau-Séjour.

Things were altered now, however. She clung to anything that was of her own blood as she had never clung before. But she shrank before the mystery of it. Was her father in danger, then? Had he outlawed himself? Was he ashamed because he was poor, and driving in a common cart? How came he here without her knowledge, wandering alone within a few hundred miles of Beau-Séjour? And why had he adjured her not to acknowledge him? Such mysteries terrified her more than she dared to think. They happened to people in books. That was all very well. People in books knew what to say and how to look. She knew nothing. She only knew that she wanted to be near her grandmother. It was frightful to be called upon to act for herself all of a sudden in such emergencies as these. Mr. Carp had told her to keep a tight hand over her husband; her father had made her responsible for his safety—perhaps for his life, how should she know?—and she had nowhere to turn.

But she was spared for the moment any sudden call upon her ingenuity. George and the stranger, on the confidential footing of men who must needs recognise their dependence upon each other in these lonely parts, were hammering, splicing, fixing, working together with a will, and all the time George's tongue was wagging as he worked.

"Never came to a smash up, that I can remember, in my life before. Devil of a job, too, we had with the horses. Why, we'd have been home by dinner-time if we'd made a start from Cochrane's this morning. Thank you; yes. The mare on the off side. I like to keep the whip hand of her, as she's a bit given to jibbing. There! I think we've made a tidy job of it at last. You'll be on your way to a selection, I suppose?"

The selector hesitates. "I have a—a—partner in the concern."

"Yes; I thought you must have a mate somewhere. Know this part of the country well?"



"I knew it as a boy very well; but I've been a—a—principally in town since then."

"And where are you thinking of settling?"

"Well, to tell the truth, my partner made the application. I hadn't much to do with it myself. I know it's somewhere on a station called Rubria. I'm to meet my partner at Rubria with the cart and building materials. It's somewhere fronting the river, I think; but really I'm not very clear about it myself."

"Rubria's our station," says George, looking the selector over. "If my uncle was up here he'd give you a warm reception. He's always cursing that new clause, I tell you. Carp's his name—Josiah Carp, of Messrs. Cavil & Carp, Flinders Lane. Everybody knows the firm. I'm not of his way of thinking, that's one thing. As far as the selectors go, we must grin and bear it—that's my motto. What's your partner's name again?"

The selector gives it deprecatingly.

"Pulver he's called—and a right honest fellow he is too, though hardly what you would call a man of the world."

"Pulver!" echoes George, "why, that's the chap who applied for the job of taking up my yearling in the train. Well, this is a go! I'll tell you what, Mr. — I don't know your name, by-the-bye?"

"Smith," interrupts the selector; "John Smith."

"Well, Mr. Smith, you can't do better than follow in the track of our buggy wheels. Pulver was to have been at the station a couple of days ago, and I expect he'll be on the lookout for you. I daresay he's got his selection pegged out already. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for your help. Here, Pauline! don't you carry those rugs. I'll stow them away. See how we've fixed up the buggy! Are you all right?" helping her in. "We'd better be started. Good day to you!"

This to Mr. Smith, who is looking fixedly at Pauline as he salutes her, while George tucks the rug round her knees. Pauline dares not look in return. She bows her head helplessly, and the buggy drives off, the weight of this new mystification making her more silent than ever. George has found out already that she is not a garrulous woman, but he is beginning to feel annoyed now by her monosyllabic replies.



"'Pon my word, Pauline, one would think you were off your chump sometimes; you haven't a word to throw to a dog. Every blessed thing I say, it's 'Yes, George!' 'No, George!' nothing more; and I don't believe you're listening half the time."

"The night on the ground confused me, I think," says Pauline, passing her hand over her forehead and turning two penitent eyes towards him.

"My darling!" cries George remorsefully; "I'm a brute, and you mustn't mind me. I'm so awfully proud and pleased to be taking you home, only I can't bear to see you looking so glum over it. I'm not a bit of a superstitious chap either—you know that—but I must say I do feel riled. First we have a break-down when we're almost, as one may say, within cooey of the homestead, and next I must dream a beastly dream about somebody kissing you that makes me feel almost as bad as if it were real."

"I shouldn't trouble myself about a dream," answers Pauline, constrained to say something. She is beginning to wonder in her own mind whether she has not been dreaming too. Could anything after all be more unreal, more dream-like, than the whole of this morning's experience? Waking on the ground in the midst of a profound solitude and silence, or of such sounds only as Jean Ingelow describes, "sounds which make not silence less," she wakes to a reality more strange than her dreams. In sleep she had been at Beau-Séjour, wandering about among every familiar object, unable to find either her grandmother or Chubby. She had called hoarsely, as people call in dreams, and the old convict gardener had hobbled up at her call with a look of dark meaning on his face. Terror had forced her to open her eyes, but her brain, still clouded by the images she had invoked, conveyed no sense of new bewilderment to her mind at the sight they rested upon. The old convict gardener had turned into her father, whose face had been a familiar recollection to her for years past. His grave scrutiny in nowise alarmed her. She was still at Beau-Séjour; he had taken them by surprise, as he had done before, and he would tell her where to look for Chubby. She had said "Father!" aloud, and her father's expression had changed. Before she



had time to discover that she was not at Beau-Séjour, to substitute for her fern-adorned verandah at home the dreary expanse of Murray plain all round her, to understand that the breathing of the mope-hawk under the laurestinus leaves was in reality George snoring near her ear—before in fact she realised where she was, or who she was, her father, yielding to a fatherly impulse, had suddenly pressed his lips against her cheek where she lay. In another second he was gone. But now her wakening faculties had returned to her. She had crept, stiff and dazed, from under the rug; George had related his dream with an air of half peevish amusement, and a selector's cart, miraculously appearing from nowhere, was wending its way towards them with a bearded man in the front.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### PAULINE'S HOME.

"This is the truth the poet sings,  
That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

—TENNYSON.

SELF-CONTEMPLATION rarely leads to satisfactory results, and even the substitution of one mental trouble for another is sometimes as salutary as the prick of a mustard plaster compared with a pain in the chest.

It was well for Pauline at this time that so new and engrossing an interest as her father's fate should have interfered to save her from egotistical self-absorption. The selector's cart had become a stationary speck in the far distance by the time she reached the township, and when the buggy started afresh on the final stage of the journey she saw that the impression made by his dream was becoming fainter in George's mind, and that he was prepared to dismiss the subject of their adventures in a few characteristic words.

"I spotted the fellow first, you know, coming in a straight line towards us. I'll take my oath he wasn't camped anywhere near us in the night. I took his measure at once, you see. I've seen such a lot of those new chums, one way and another. They knock down all their money at the first go-off, and then there's nothing for them to do but to go and jackaroo up in Queensland. Say, Pauline! doesn't the country look dead and alive about here?"

"It looks dead," replies Pauline, with an emphasis on the dead.

"And the sheep! My goodness me!" ejaculates George mournfully, as a few blundering rams ran across the track, "talk about their being poor! Why, they're only fit for the boiling-down pot!"

There is a long interval. George soliloquises sadly as



the buggy bounds over the dry herbage. They have reached a post and rail fence, and he explains to his wife that when he has taken down the slip panels and led the horses through the opening they will be at home.

"Home!" echoes Pauline looking round. So this is home! The unruly thoughts surge up afresh. Is the monotonous grey level typical of the life that is beginning for her from to-day? Will the only breaks be as harsh as the line of gaunt gums ahead, twisting themselves like tortured souls out of their shreddy bark? the only goal as far off, as impalpable, as the horizon that bounds them? Again the buggy rattles over the dry rutty earth. Pauline must now learn to recognise the landmarks about her home.

"I'll make a bushman of you in no time, my old woman," remarks George encouragingly. "You just remember this is the track right bang to the homestead. You go along it, you see, for a matter of four or five miles, and then you come to the home paddock."

During the next hour there is literally nothing to see. Even the birds seem to be of the same opinion, and only the stupid sheep nibble mechanically at the tussocks still left on the dusty soil. But at last Pauline utters an exclamation.

"Oh, George! I see a sort of uneven line of trees—such pretty trees, with dark green, soft, balloony tops—what grand'mère would call *bombé*, not gums or light-wood or myrtle, I am sure; and—yes! a whole tangle of foliage on a slope—a river bank, I think; and I can follow its course for miles!"

"That's the Murray," explains George. "And I say, look to the right, on this side of the river, the Victorian side, of course; don't you see anything else by this time?"

"Wait a minute. I'm beginning to see a cluster of little roofs. First, though, there's a whole collection of railed-in enclosures."

"The sheep-yards," says George; "and back from them, do you see that great long wooden building? that's the shearing shed; and nearly alongside of it—a queer old shanty, do you see?—that's the accommodation hut."

"Yes; and oh, George! what is it that looks like a giant swing—only there's no swing in it—a sort of scaffold then, standing in one of the enclosures?"

"That? oh, that's where we kill the bullocks. Don't



turn up your eyes—you needn't come to see it. There's the forge right away there, and the place where we keep our stores; that detached building's the men's huts. Well, do you see the house?"

"Not yet," a little anxiously.

"Can't you make it out?" he says, laughing. "There's the garden plain enough."

Yes, Pauline can see the garden; an oblong piece of ground, fenced in all round by wood-work, furze-bushes, and gum saplings.

"Now you can see the roof, eh?"

Yes; she can see a low sloping roof covering a cottage built of wood. The front door opens on to a small verandah, and the verandah looks on the afore-mentioned narrow garden, bounded by the gum saplings.

"I suppose there isn't any view—exactly," she asks, assuming an unsuccessful air of cheerful proprietary interest in the disposition of the Rubria dwelling. Her husband, however, has never been accustomed to regard the place as open to criticism from an æsthetic point of view. He answers promptly—

"Well, there's not much of a look-out, I suppose; but it's jolly snug, I tell you. Not half a bad crib inside either."

While he is speaking, they are drawing near enough to see such signs of active life as may be seen at any hour while it is light around an Australian station dwelling. While George is pointing out his stables and his loose-boxes—the various outbuildings that have grown up like new members of successive types, as improving conditions required them, Pauline is looking at the people and animals brought together by the sound of the buggy wheels. Of people she sees: a weather-beaten Scotchwoman, all kitchen apron and well-worn plaid square, pinned shawl-like across the shoulders; a swagman curiously looking round, in the act of walking off, with his blanket and quart-pot strapped up behind his neck; a station-hand in blue shirt and high riding-boots, butcher's knife in hand; a whity-brown boy, in feature resembling the weather-beaten Scotchwoman, puffing at the remnants in his father's pipe. Of animals: four sheep-dogs, tumbling over each other towards the buggy; a large kangaroo dog, with curled-



up tail, running in the same direction with leisurely dignity; a domesticated sheep, unwieldy with the fat of a life exempt from care; a variety of less obtrusive but generally noisy dogs, foals, cows, calves, and chickens in the background. Of nondescripts (for, whether regarded as human beings or animals, Pauline thought them an equal libel on both): two grovelling old black women, crouched against the fence in a position which must have originated the word "squatting."

Pauline has barely time to take in these details before the buggy comes to a halt. The evening sun is at its hottest—at least she will always associate with a cloudless sky her first impressions of her new home. Against the bright deep blue overhead every object stands out as if asserting itself before her questioning gaze: large and small buildings, ranged round the yard like a growing family of sheds—the great wood-heap in the middle, suggestive of a lifetime of firelight musings—the few straggling gums, throwing their meagre shadows on the sandy soil. Now the buggy has pulled up at last, near the back entrance to the house, and George stands up in it, with a "Hi—hillo!" as he throws the reins to the whity-brown boy and the station-hand in waiting.

"And how's yourself, Mrs. McClosky?" he says jocularly, looking down from the buggy on the hard-featured Scotchwoman below; "how's the world been using you since I went away, eh? I've not been for nothing, have I? I've fetched you home a mistress, you see."

"An' ye should ha' gien me word, Mester Drafton," replies Mrs. McClosky, in a loud aggrieved voice, while George gets out and jumps his wife to the ground; "it's na mair than I was expectin'." Then turning to Pauline and holding out a hand hard as her face, "I bid ye welcome, Mrs. Drafton!"

"Thank you," says Pauline, absurdly embarrassed in presence of her servant.

Taking into account the expression of the two women at this first interview, the chances of submission are decidedly in favour of Pauline. To George this is a true home-coming, to Pauline an experience that she does not dare as yet to analyse.

The lithe kangaroo-dog, more effusive than Mrs. McClosky, seems to embrace his master as he stands



on his hind feet scrabbling with his two forepaws on George's waistcoat in the effort to reach his shoulders.

"Just look at him, Pauline!" says George, returning the dog's caress. "This is Veno, dear old Veno—the finest dog in the district. Come on, Veno! we'll show your missis the house."

He turns into the house, and leads Pauline up the narrow passage running straight through it from the front to the back door. Its walls are adorned with slate-coloured horses, as full-chested as pouter pigeons, prancing on a buff ground. Through the front door that George throws wide open Pauline can see out into the little wooden verandah and the narrow garden, shaped like a parallelogram, in front. There are fig-trees along the path, and thyme borders round the beds. This is all she can see at a first glance, the gum saplings hiding even the far-stretching plain from her view.

The house at Rubria had been built by Mr. Carp as a matter of necessity and it was grudgingly built, because Josiah was never likely to err on the side of liberality.

But in George's eyes it was "home," and we see our homes as we see our relatives, through a medium of our own.

Pauline feels that some comment is expected of her as her husband shows her the different rooms.

"See here, now," he begins, opening a door on the left hand side of the entrance door, "what do you think of that for a front parlour and sitting-room, eh?"

"It's very nice," answers Pauline faintly, wondering within herself what possible transformation of herself or the room can ever give it a home-like, familiar aspect. The paper is apparently covered all over with a perplexing arrangement of brick and rhubarb-coloured watch-pockets. A round table seems to have taken root in the exact centre of a new green carpet. A dozen stiff chairs, looking as if they had set out by common consent from precisely measured distances and stopped simultaneously half-way, are ranged round it with mathematical exactitude. The new piano that Pauline chose in town stands in a shallow recess near the fireplace, balanced on the other side by a highly varnished bookcase. Over the mantelpiece rests a square pier-glass, engaged in a perpetual exchange of bows with an oleograph picture opposite. The inspection of this room is soon over.



"Now for my little den," says George, opening the door on the other side of the passage and drawing Pauline into a small square room, half office, half dining-room. The station account-books lie piled on a side table with specimens of wool, "washed" and "greasy." Double-barrelled guns, stockwhips, riding whips, two or three native spears, bits, sporting journals, turf registers, all seem to have found their nooks in this, his favourite retreat.

"But wait till you've seen *our* room," continues George, leading the way with the air of a man who has kept his trump card to the last.

He throws open the room behind his sanctum, watching for Pauline's approval the while.

Pauline does not know whether to laugh or to cry as he points out his purchases: the towering gilt bedstead, so majestic in size as to suggest the idea that the little room must have been built round it, as temples are built round heaven-sent gifts; the costly wardrobe; the pier-glass before which his wife must try on her dresses for his approval, when he is going to take her to the township. But Pauline sees her pile of trunks against the wall, and seeing them, is fain to turn her head away.

George, on his side, is in such overweening spirits that with one spring he perches himself on the topmost trunk of all.

"Don't bother with any of your things to-night," he says, thinking his wife looks rather paler than usual, and attributing it to fatigue. "I only wish you'd take off that grandmother's gown," looking disapprovingly down from his height at the sombre travelling dress she is wearing. "Put on something with a colour, for goodness' sake. That chattering Pulver's been blowing about you in the kitchen like anything, I know. I just want to take you round the place and let the people here have a stare at you. Then they'll be satisfied. Now don't say, 'Won't I do as I am, George?'" for I know it's on the tip of your tongue; isn't it now?"

"No indeed," she replies, assuming an air of simplicity. "I'll put on my ball-dress if you like, and my bridal bonnet, and walk up and down in front of those old black women outside. Then I'll come in and change, and parade before Pulver in my violet silk. Mrs. McClosky must be considered too. Do you know if she has a fancy for *couleur de cuir*?"



"I don't like that sort of chaff, I tell you, Pauline," says George, aggrieved. "If you don't want to oblige me, say the word!" Then suddenly altering his tone as he jumps to the ground from his height, "Don't you know, my darling, I want all the world, high and low, to think as much of you as I do? I'd have the whole lot of them at your feet if I could."

Whereupon a compromise was effected. Pauline discarded her sombre travelling-dress for the soft grey, with a parti-coloured scarf of George's choosing. Then he took his wife on his arm and sallied forth with her on a tour of inspection. The yearling was frisking about near his stable. The sight of Pulver at the stable door, throwing out hay on a fork, renewed Pauline's impressions of the morning with an intensity that almost resembled physical suffering.

George was overflowing with good-will towards every one.

"All right, Pulver, eh?" he calls in a genial voice, on seeing the shock head at the stable door.

"Hearty, sir; hearty!" responds the wheezy voice. The head makes a duck in George's direction, and the small dull eyes fasten themselves on Pauline with the expression of dog-like devotion she remembers so well. Even on the Murray plains, after a day of unclouded sunshine, there is sometimes in the beginning of winter a chill wind towards evening. Such a breeze was rising now, and George and Pauline bent their steps to the house.

To George it was an evening full of promise. He gave the reins to his imagination, and saw a rose-coloured vista stretched before him. If he had had any misgivings on the score of marrying Pauline against her will, these misgivings gave him but little uneasiness now the thing was done. He felt himself growing fonder of her every day. He would make her grow fonder of him as well. There was the yearling, too. It surpassed his first estimate of it already. With ordinary luck (and why should he not have ordinary luck, like other men?) a day must come when he would see his colt, backed for something worth the winning, striding in front of all the others past the judge's stand on the Flemington racecourse. Pauline, of course, would be standing next to him, for even the Melbourne Cup would mean nothing without her; and he would see her dear



face smile as he rushed off to the saddling-paddock to enjoy a foretaste of the sweets of his triumph. Perhaps this moment of unclouded anticipation was one of the happiest of his life, but as he did not know it to be so, he believed himself to be only partially happy, with a prospect of complete bliss in store. When they reached the house, he saw his wife pass through the passage and step out into the narrow garden beyond, and he leaned against the door, watching her as she moved about among the thyme borders.

"She's beginning to take an interest in her home already," thought George, far from conjecturing that her train of ideas could be so different from his. And all the time Pauline was saying to herself—

"How will it end—how will it end? I am eighteen now, and terribly healthy! I may have twice the length of years that I have lived already to live over again, and already I feel as if life were hardly worth the having; as if every day would be too long, and the time would never pass away. Even my life is not my own now! It has all been pledged to George." She paused, and her husband smiled at her contemplation of the fig-trees. "As if there were not enough to divide us already, I see a trouble shaping itself out in the future that I am not responsible for—for if my father is near me and in trouble, I must be there to help him at least, and George will want to know, and he *must not* know. For how much of the rest of my trouble am I responsible, I wonder? Not for so large a share after all. I warned George as much as I dared to warn him, and he would not listen; and it has all come to pass, all that I dreaded so much. But now warnings are out of the question; and as to saying, 'I told you so!' it would be useless and cruel. It would be poisoning George's life to no purpose whatever. No! there is nothing for it but to act a double part. If I could only smooth the way just at the outset! If I could only make-believe to myself that I am here on a visit! It would be cowardly, but it would help me along. I need not limit the time of my visit, but I might think, 'When it is over there will be such and such things to tell grand'mère and Chubby.'" Another stoppage in her



walk. "She's got housekeeping in her eye now!" reflects George, as he sees her looking down on the potato beds. "No! I'm a fool, and as grand'mère used to tell me, I want everything smooth. If I could only find comfort in thinking of the miserable people I used to fancy I pitied; I'm sure there are miserable people enough to take comfort by. My misery is nothing to sickness and poverty after all. A sentimental misery at best. An inability to give as much as I get. It would be worse the other way surely. Nobody knows. In time, this dreary cottage may seem as much my home as if it were dear, beautiful Beau-Séjour. And there is so much for me to do too. I must find out from grand'mère without delay what she knows about my father. And Pulver too! he reminds me of our old gardener. I know he is to be trusted. Perhaps he knows all about my relationship to the selector already."

Pondering thus, she has been walking towards the house, and now finds herself face to face with George.

"I'll make them put a fire in my little snugery," he said. "Come in, my darling, and tell Mrs. McClosky to hurry up with the tea. I'm jolly hungry, I tell you! To think I've got you at last! 'Pon my word, Pauline, I never seem to have believed it altogether till now."

"Well, I'm not quite a person to be overlooked," she replied, with an attempt at the old sprightliness; "I almost fill up the passage as it is."

"You fill up my heart, darling," said her husband, "that's what you do, and what you'll do too as long as I live."

The McClosky now announced tea with grim severity. She had no notion of giving up the reins of management to this inexperienced young girl, as she had already found occasion to inform her husband in the kitchen. For McClosky was not without perception of the beautiful, above all when the beautiful was embodied in a young woman. He had delivered himself thus to his wife on the subject—

"A bonnie white lass, and nane o' yer fine toon leddies that canna speak ceevil to a mon! The mair fit for the bush, I'm thinking."

"The mair fit for skule, I'm thinkin'," returned his



wife with asperity, rustling disdainfully past the simple McClosky with the teapot.

There was a pile of papers lying on the tea-table.

"The English papers, you bet!" exclaimed George. "I quite forgot what a lot of mails had come in since I went away. It's not a good line reading all tea-time, and I'll give it up now I've got you to look at. Hullo! what are you staring at? Why don't you pour out tea?"

"I'm looking at the court news," says Pauline, forcing a laugh, and thrusting the home news down on her lap as she shovels unlimited lumps of sugar into George's cup.

The fact is, her eyes have caught a paragraph that has almost wrenched a scream from her lips.

"Guthrie Vyner," runs the paragraph, "lieutenant on board H.M.S. *Bellona*, under arrest for striking his superior officer, has escaped from Malta on board a small fishing-craft. It is conjectured that his escape was connived at, and that he is gone to South America in a trader."



## CHAPTER XV.

### *A VISIT TO A SELECTION.*

"Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness."—COWPER.

IF as a child you have ever amused yourself by growing a crop of mustard and cress upon a strip of moist flannel, and watched the tiny fibrous roots clinging to the flannel as they would have clung to Mother Earth, you will have seen in the physical an example of adaptation which has its counterpart in the moral world. It is not we ourselves who change with the changing conditions around us. The "Ego" recognises itself whether its visible incarnation be on a throne or the gallows. But outwardly we conform readily to new circumstances and surroundings. Mrs. Cophetua, you may be sure, at the end of a week trailed her gold-broidered gown with as good an air as if she had been accustomed to strut in a palace all the days of her life. The flower-loving Proserpine must have found life among the shades below durable after a short experience of them, or even that bullying domestic tyrant Jupiter could never have constrained her to pass six months in them, all the year round. As for the Sabine women, everybody knows what exemplary spouses they became, notwithstanding that they were transplanted without as much as a "By your leave!"

From all which it follows that, in course of time, Pauline conducted herself in the eyes of the watchful little world at Rubria very much as an ordinary young woman might have done who had not married in spite of her grandmother and in spite of herself, who had not trembled at the approach of her wedding-day and let fall hot bitter tears when it was over—who had not promised her life in a moment of infatuation, putting her love, indeed, quite out of the question—but who had, on the contrary, been married with a flourish of



trumpets and a confident heart, and a blessed assurance that should her husband's world turn out to be at the North Pole or at the bottom of a coal-pit, either North Pole or coal-pit would become henceforth her world and her resting-place too. But to pass with credit in the eyes of the watchful little world was not to pass with credit in her own. Pauline knew for the very best of reasons that she was Pauline still. Her trouble was neither to be coaxed nor scared nor argued away. Only it had become in a measure her "familiar," and was less talkative and obtrusive at one season than at another. Sometimes she could pacify it by putting forth the whole of her energies in any particular direction. It was quiet while she was mastering a passage in — or wondering what Carlyle was driving at in "Sartor Resartus," but it clamoured so much after any of these efforts that she found no heart for them at last. She would never allow her familiar to thrust its society upon George. On the other hand, it hampered her sorely when she was writing to her grandmother or Chubby. She could not tell where or how it intruded itself, but there it was, making its influence felt "between the lines." In vain she filled whole pages with elaborate descriptions of station life, drew funny pictures of her utter subserviency to the virile-minded Mrs. McClosky, sketched diabolical old black women, and yearlings with their heels in the air. at the end of her letters to Chubby—all this threw not one grain of dust into her grandmother's eyes. Things were as madame had expected—no worse, certainly. She abstained on her side from telling Pauline how entirely the light had gone out of her own life. There were moments of despondency in which she wondered whether she had actually suffered more when the wayward Rosalie was hidden away under the earth than when she assisted on Pauline's marriage-day at the burial of all her own hopes and desires concerning her. Madame, moreover, did not know all, for Pauline, who had never had a secret from her grandmother in her life, dared not betray the secret of her father's presence at Rubria. This was the small cloud that sometimes obscured even the presence of the "familiar" itself. She had torn out the page in the "home news," and



felt confident that George knew nothing of her father's disgrace. But George had come across a similar paragraph in the European mail, and shrinking from wounding his wife by the news, had thought himself clever in destroying the paper. Neither referred to the subject, and each believed the other to be in ignorance of it.

"It's a good job she didn't see it," thought George, after he had stared uncomfortably at the name of Guthrie Vyner in such connection. "She doesn't fret very much about the old man any way; and she's a jolly sight better off, thinking he's cooked by the natives in the South Seas, or gone to the bottom of the sea, than to be told he's sloped to get out of doing a sentence."

The idea of connecting his wife's father with Mr. John Smith, the selector, never once occurred to George. He would as soon have supposed Mrs. McClosky to be his aunt. He admitted that the selector was a gentleman, and it would not have surprised him to find out that his name was not John Smith; but every gentleman who selects on your station on the Murray, and takes the name of John Smith for convenience' sake, is not necessarily your wife's escaped father.

After Pulver had left him, George had confided to Pauline that "he did not think much of Master Pulver."

"But he did all you gave him to do very well, didn't he, George?" she inquired, hoping for her father's sake that Pulver was a reliable friend.

"That's right enough," demurred George; "but what did he want sneaking up to the house after I'd sacked him, and asking to see the young missis?—so McClosky told me."

"Did he do that?" she cried in a tone of alarm. "When?"

"When! the very day after we came. Don't you remember Smith's cart was outside, and I brought him in to have a nip, and you wouldn't come out of your room to see him?"

"Yes, I remember; and then you said they were both gone, didn't you?"

"No; I said Smith was off, and Pulver was hanging about the place as if he couldn't make up his mind to leave it."

The thought flashed across Pauline's mind like a sudden sharp pain that her father must have sent her a message by this man. George was referring to an



event that had happened weeks ago. What if it were too late for her to do what her father wanted? How selfish and apathetic she had been. She had been content to trust to a chance meeting with him, and the words had died in her mouth when she had framed a question to George. She was utterly ignorant of the penalty attached to Guthrie Vyner's fault. Whether he might be discovered in Australia, and whether, on being discovered, he might be marched off and shut up in prison, were themes of tormenting conjecture to her. It is true that her affection for her father was based upon instinct more than upon habit. She had heard her grandmother speak of him as "*un jeune étourdi*"—and describe him as hasty and impulsive. But he was her father, and in trouble—and she blamed herself bitterly for her cowardice, and for having trusted every morning that the day would bring some news of him or indicate how she was to act. She was at dinner while this conversation was going on; a meal over the preparation of which Mrs. McClosky held jealous sway, scouting all Pauline's well-meant efforts to oust the station teapot from the mid-day board.

"You never told me where Mr. Smith had settled," said Pauline suddenly, when she thought George had applied himself in earnest to his mutton.

"Farther up the river; didn't I tell you? They've got a water frontage, and not the worst bit of land either. That Pulver's a neat-handed chap, I'll say that for him. I don't fancy Smith can be so hard up either. Pulver fixed up a very decent hut for the two of them. I think he's the real boss, mind you, between ourselves."

"Couldn't we ride round that way some day?" Pauline asked diffidently; "I have such hazy ideas about that sort of bush life. I don't know what people begin by doing when they find themselves with three hundred and twenty acres of earth and a kitchen table to start with."

"You were foggy enough about this sort of life at the start, my darling," replied her husband, attacking the mutton afresh. "I don't believe you could tell me half what a squatter's got to look after now!"

"Oh yes, I could—at least I have a very fair idea of it. He must abuse the weather unremittingly every day to begin with, and say that every one will be 'up



a tree'—I think that's the expression—unless there's rain. He must keep tally when the sheep are being counted or draughted, I'm not sure which, and swear—no, he needn't swear—when they get boxed. He picks them out for market too, doesn't he? and some days he jumps on and off his horse all day, and rides about his fences, and talks to his men about fat sheep and store sheep, and ploughing and killing! You think I don't listen, I know, when we're out on the run. Oh, and then at home, if he isn't breaking in horses, or talking about politics or the drought to a neighbour squatter, he pets his dogs, or reads the paper, or sits with his feet in the air, singing 'Tommy Dodd.'"

"That's not quite a true bill, when your squatter's got a wife to look at like you; eh, my old woman?"

"Of course," continued Pauline, ignoring the interruption, "I'm not taking hunting or shooting into account."

"No, nor lots of things besides. Precious little a station would bring in if a man had nothing to do but what you give him credit for! Well, that's settled. We'll ride round by the selection this afternoon, and if you like we'll go kangarooing to-morrow, and take Veno and the pups; we're bound to drop across some kangaroo; and I say, when you've done your pudding, come up and have a look at the colt. I never saw such a coat as he's getting. He's a regular beauty. If we don't pull off a Melbourne Cup with him my name isn't George Drafton. I'm going to call him Victory, I think, for I've made up my mind he's to win."

"Would you be dreadfully, awfully disappointed if he didn't come up to your expectations, George? It makes me afraid to see you reckoning so much upon it beforehand."

"Don't croak, for the Lord's sake, Pauline! It'll be a matter of pounds, shillings, and pence, that's what it'll be. I can see plain enough what this drought's bringing us to. There's universal ruin staring us in the face, my dear, take my word for it."

"O George!" Pauline exclaimed, no shadow of discomposure crossing her face.

Minds ill at ease hail a revolution, domestic or otherwise. Pauline thought her familiar might become more manageable if they were turned out of Rubria—George to break stones along the road, she to live like the



women she had seen on her journey, in a canvas tent, cooking his dinner beyond reach of Mrs. McClosky's criticism. Universal ruin would mean, on the other hand, the loss of her black horse. Pauline thought less hopefully of the drought an hour later, while riding along the track near the river with George. Though the ground below them was white with dust, though all around the earth was cracked as if it had opened a thousand gaping lips for moisture, the air from the water was still pure and pleasant to breathe; though blackened stumps, and dead, grey gums stretching their withered arms aloft, made fit adornment for such a setting as the naked earth, there were still at distant intervals lightwoods and myrtles, round and stately in outline. There were still the river banks, luxurious in dark scrub; the noisy parrots, red and blue and gold and green; the bright yellow lustre of the declining sun, the fragrant aroma of the peppermint trees. What if she could be content with a little less—could feel that to be young and strong, and mounted on a horse that swung her along in such elastic fashion, was happiness enough for a day? She might tutor herself after all into resignation and cheerfulness. In the first place, she must see her father, and persuade him to trust in George as well as in her. There would be one bugbear removed to begin with. She could not tell how much of peace might follow.

While Pauline was talking down her familiar after this fashion, George was improving upon the original "Tommy Dodd" in a shrill falsetto. "Tommy Dodd is sure to win. Tommy Dodd! Tommy Dodd!" The parrots shrieked in chorus, and the familiar woke up to listen. George looked steadfastly, now and then, at the figure by his side. The clear pale face and throat, so softly white against the universal black of habit, and hat, and horse, the dark eyes, so wistful and subdued of late, the sweep of closely-packed hair from the temple to the nape, made a picture that he devoured with his eyes. The barren dreariness of his life, before Pauline shared it with him, struck him as he looked. His thoughts reverted to his courting days, and he remembered another ride before he was married. He shuddered at the recollection of the torturing fears that had assailed him in those days of uncertain happiness.



"Do you know, my darling," he said suddenly, "I was thinking what a life you led me before we were married. I was never sure of you from one day to another. You never 'cheek' me now, do you? You seem to have shaken into place in no time."

"Yes," Pauline replied, with a smile, but it was a smile so indefinable in its signification, that even George felt there was something not entirely satisfactory about it, and that such a smile must be followed up.

"You look so queer, my old woman, as much as to tell me you know a devil of a lot that I don't know. Isn't it true what I've been saying, eh?"

"Of course," answered Pauline hurriedly; she was wrestling with her familiar, not with George. "What is truth after all? Whatever you believe is truth to you, isn't it? Our truths may be ever so different, I know, but they're truth to each of us all the same."

Some impulse to escape took unaccountable possession of Pauline's horse at this moment. He shook his head, and dipped it impatiently forward. George could see him flinging his hoofs into the air a minute later and sweeping across the plain as if he were running a race. George did not feel quite at ease as he saw Pauline's habit bulging in the wind. He urged his own bay mare into a gallop, cogitating on the causes of this sudden freak.

"What's up now?" he thought. "Did I put her on her mettle by telling her she'd got 'so quiet? She was off in no time; but what on earth did I say that could have riled her? that's what I'd like to know."

Neither of the horses came to a halt until the selector's hut was in sight. George only came up with Pauline after she had reined in, and was trying to coax Mulatto into a walk. Fired with his gallop, the animal arched his crest and quivered to begin again.

"That was a good spin!" said George, willing to avoid all abstract discussions on the nature of truth. "We've got the horses into a nice state, and it's given you a colour like a pink rose. Just look what a lather they're in."

Pauline was greatly relieved to know that she was flushed. Her husband would probably attribute her agitation to the gallop, and she was now close to her



father's dwelling. The selector's hut, as could be seen from the outside, consisted only of a single room built of slabs of seasoned wood. Pauline could see the very faintest appearance of smoke drifting with the passing current of air above the rough projecting chimney that flanked the hut.

It would have been hard to conceive a more desolate situation. The parched plain stretched all round it, unbroken in its dingy level, save for the dingy gums and the dingier post and rail fences. The line of river bank, covered in places, as Pauline had seen, by darkly shaded evergreens, was here bare and unpromising. Reeds, so split and frayed that one would suppose they had been tearing each other to pieces, shook their melancholy heads over dried ferns and shrivelled scrub. "Poor father!" thought Pauline, "is it possible that all this time I have been thinking about myself, and commiserating my own lot?" Her familiar had never seemed so ugly as now. She shamed it into silence as she rode on. George, as a practical man, was preparing to criticise Mr. Smith's method of going to work.

"Awful poor country this, eh, Pauline? I don't understand these chaps at all. They come and squat down on a bit of land as bare as my hand, and I don't see that they've stocked it either. Look at all those farm implements round the house too! that's all money thrown away. That Pulver's a wonder, though, in some ways. Bless my soul if I don't believe he's ploughing over there! You might as well expect to get a crop off a mahogany table! Come on, and I'll give him a bit of advice."

"No, I'll wait for you here," Pauline called to him, pulling up her horse almost in front of the selector's hut, while George trotted off in the direction of Pulver. She could hardly believe that her chance had come at last. Her heart almost stopped beating as she bent forwards towards the rude doorway and called gently "Father!"

There was a scraping sound inside the hut. A tin pannikin rolled out of the doorway, followed by the tall figure of Mr. John Smith. Divested of his stout overcoat, and dressed only in moleskin trousers and Crimean shirt, he seemed to Pauline thinner and more



worn than he had first appeared to her. The expression of his face was fretful and jaded, but the face itself asserted its close kinship with Pauline. The man might possibly be selfish, or violent, or shallow—he could not help looking like a gentleman.

“Papa,” Pauline said, in pitiful tones, taking his outstretched hand, all covered with flour—it was evident that Mr. John Smith had been making the damper —“dear papa!”

She could get no further for the break in her voice, and she had so much to say and so little time to say it in!

“There—there—my dear! don’t, now, don’t,” expostulated Mr. Smith, patting her hand, whereby he caused a whole shower of flour to disperse itself over the front of her black riding-skirt; “there’s no occasion for it, I assure you!”

“Well, but, papa, what can I do for you? Will you be hurt?”

The selector, looking up at her, saw such a world of tender anxiety shining out of her troubled eyes, that his own face softened in turn.

“You mustn’t alarm yourself about me in the very smallest degree,” he told her, resting his floury hand on her horse’s mane; “I shall have to hide away for a time—that’s all!”

“Then, father, dear,” she cried eagerly, “let me say who you are, I entreat you, only to George. It would be so much better. I can see you then, and be with you when I like. George will keep your secret, I know; and what can I do for you as it is? Nothing but grieve—and I do mind so very very much!”

Her father’s face grew gloomily determined.

“On no account, on no account whatever!” He emphasised his refusal harshly, as it seemed to Pauline. “You will drive me away if you betray me. Your husband may be a very worthy young man, but I have no claim upon him. I trust nobody. I will have nobody in my confidence; do you hear? With Pulver there it is another matter. I did him good service once on board the *Musk*. He chooses to return it in this way. As for you, Pauline, if you had not recognised me that morning I should never have troubled your life with my existence.”



"But as I do know, papa," pleaded Pauline, "tell me now, quickly, how can I see you, and what can I do for you?"

"Forget that I am here, if you can," said her father bitterly; then, touched by the pain in her face, "No, not that. I will send for you, I promise, if I want you. But you must run no risks. I am afraid as it is your husband will suspect something. Would you credit it? Pulver declares he knew you for my child the very first time he saw you."

"Yes! and papa, you nearly betrayed yourself by kissing me the other morning."

"I couldn't help it," said her father, softening again; "it was such a shock—such a revelation—to find you lying there on the ground. I had fancied you still quite a little girl. Let me see, you must be seventeen or eighteen by this time. Dear, dear me! Your grandmother was always an eccentric woman, Pauline. One would have thought she had seen enough of youthful marriages in the family!" he smiled rather bitterly. "Your mother made a love-match, too."

"Oh! it isn't a love-match," Pauline said hastily—unthinkingly.

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" exclaimed her father. "Who could have forced you into it?"

"Oh nobody—nothing!" stammered Pauline, overwhelmed with confusion. "I mean, grand'mère was against it."

"You might have waited, then," said her father doubtfully. He was trying to remember what Rosalie was like in those early bridal days, when he would have committed any extravagance to gratify her smallest caprice. Thinking of her more impartially now, across the eighteen years that had severed him from her, he was obliged to admit that Pauline was a fairer woman than her mother.

"I had promised Mr. Drafton. He is very good to me; I am getting used to him, papa. Look, he is coming!"

When George trotted up to the hut, he found Mr. Smith standing in the doorway with his hat off, Pauline sitting stiff in her saddle, apparently at a loss to find anything more to say to him.



"Good day, Mr. Smith!" said George, extending his hand; "I've been telling Pulver how he'd better work the place if he wants to make it pay. I don't see much show for any of us though, if this sort of weather's to last much longer. We're over-stocked here, you see, as it is. It's a poor look-out for any one commencing this game just now!"

"Yes, fate isn't propitious, I'm afraid!" sighed the selector, leading George to infer that a good shower of rain would wash out all his grievances. "Can't I induce you to come inside for a minute?"

"Come, Pauline," said her husband; "you said you wanted to know all about it at dinner-time."

He was on the ground in an instant, and ready to lift her down.

"Why, what on earth have you been doing with yourself? You're all over white in front!"

"Am I? I don't know!" she stammered.

A less acute eye than George's could hardly have failed to detect her confusion. His face grew dark with an expression Pauline had never seen before. She could hardly refrain from trembling as he lifted her to the ground, and made way for her to precede him into the selector's hut, while he tied up the horses outside.

Let those who make a boast of the tidiness of women learn what is meant by the tidiness of sailors. A lieutenant's cabin is a puzzle to a landsman. He sees the puzzle complete; he could not put it together. But long experience of "Mountain billows to the clouds, in dreadful tumult swelled," as Thomson says, probably before he had had any experience of the sea whatever, has given to sailors a key to the puzzle which landsmen cannot use. They know how to have things ship-shape, taking thereby a lesson from Nature, for the "right thing in the right place" is Nature's constant aim, no matter how many victims must be shovelled out of the way to attain it. An ordinary selector's hut would not have borne the impress of fingers accustomed to lashing objects into their places. The floor of beaten earth was smooth and level. It was covered in places with tiger and leopard skins, which gave it an aspect of barbaric magnificence rather than of rough poverty. The kitchen table—all that Pauline had already seen of



the contents of the selector's cart—stood fair in the middle of the room, white as the deck of an ocean steamer; on one corner of it stood a panful of half-kneaded dough. The "Lares and Penates" assumed in Mr. John Smith's hut the homely forms of a camp-oven, a great pot, a tin billy, and a gridiron. Judging from their shiny exterior they must have been accustomed to reverence, as conveyed in a treatment of soap and sand. Across the camp bedstead and stretched on opposite sides of the room, coloured blankets and rugs were hung with precision. A cane arm-chair, and a chest, two empty cases placed laterally one on the other, doing duty for butler's pantry, library, and secretary, made up the furniture. George found himself immediately at home on the unoccupied corner of the table. The selector brought forward the arm-chair for Pauline, who, turning her face towards the fire that her husband might not see it, allowed it to scorch steadily as a screen for her heightened colour.

"'Pon my word," said George, looking round him, and swinging one leg backwards and forwards under the table as he was speaking, "you seem to have a pretty considerable idea of making things comfortable, Mr. Smith! Fine tiger-skin that over there! Been to Africa in your time, I expect?"

Mr. Smith hesitated for an instant before replying.

"Yes; well, not exactly, if by going to Africa you mean going into the interior. I've been to the Cape once or twice."

"Ah!" said George; "been in the navy at all?"

Mr. Smith turned suddenly round at this point-blank question—he had been standing with his back to the fire, facing George—and poked at the burning logs of wood with his foot.

"I'm afraid the heat is too much for Mrs. Drafton. Let me get you a book to serve as a screen," he said, turning to Pauline.

He bustled across to one of the cases for a book, and laid hands at the same time on a whisky-bottle and a tumbler.

"I've nothing else to offer you, Mr. Drafton," he said, dipping a jug into a bucket of water under the table, and handing it to George.



"Best drink going, too," replied George, taking up the bottle. "You were saying you'd been to the Cape, I think?"

"Yes; was I?" said the selector, turning for the second time to Pauline. "I wish I could prevail on Mrs. Drafton to take something. A cup of tea, now? Let me make you a cup of tea."

"No, no, thank you!" Pauline said, rising from her chair and gathering her long habit under her arm. "We'd better go, if George—if Mr. Drafton is ready. It gets dark so soon."

She spoke so hurriedly—the words were uttered so despondently, that George again looked sharply into her face.

"I'll be off as soon as you like,"—he finished his whisky and water at a gulp. "You'll tell Pulver, Mr. Smith, I can let him have that harrow when he wants it. He seems to be a first-rate working chap. You've known him before, he tells me."

"Oh, I've known Pulver a long time," answered the selector ambiguously.

"Good day, Mrs. Drafton—good day to you, Mr. Drafton!"

In reaching across for his hat his floury sleeve attracted George's attention for the first time, but no remark was made, and a moment later he could hear the thud of the horses' retreating footsteps becoming fainter and more faint in the distance.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### *WHAT GEORGE BROUGHT AWAY FROM THE SELECTOR'S HUT.*

"Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy ;  
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on."

—SHAKSPERE.

PAULINE liked the Murray plains better under the evening than the morning sky. In the absence of clouds—and during this period of drought there were hardly any clouds to be seen—the wavy lines and ripples of unshaded gold and red lay close against the pale blue background, like streaks of paint, undisturbed by any wandering flakes of colour; the blackened stumps, the brown grass, the straggling fences, were all blurred into a warm uniform grey. Against the flame-coloured horizon, the spaces between the gums and she-oaks seemed full of fire. The crickets clamoured underground as if they were directing all the subterraneous machinery in the world, and the parrots screeched overhead in defiance of them. But every sound fell unheeded on Pauline's ear to-night. That an explosion of some sort was impending she felt instinctively, unreasonably assured. She could feel it in George's demeanour during the homeward ride—in his regulation of his horse's paces without regard to hers—in his unusual and ominous silence. It was almost dark when they reached the homestead; the kitchen lamp, the lantern in the stable, the candle in the men's hut, all threw out their separate feeble streams of light, giving to Rubria the appearance of an infant settlement. The sound of the horses' feet was always a signal for the dogs at the station to break into tumultuous barking. They rushed out in a noisy horde, snapping at each other's tails and ears, wolf-like, until assured of the character of the visitors. Pauline had learnt to distinguish between the loud angry bark



of inquiry, the modified bark of half-recognition, and the yapping bark of welcome. She had learnt, too, to give George at least five minutes' patient waiting until Veno, Pepper, Lassie, Echo, and half a dozen others, had each received his due share of fondling or scolding, as the case might be. She knew that George must be embraced by Veno, and must institute a howling duet with Pepper, while Lassie and Swift wrangled round his knees. She looked upon it to-night as a portentous sign that George on dismounting distributed a kick among the disconcerted group of dogs. "Get out, you noisy brutes!" he said. "We must get rid of some of these curs, Alexander; do you hear?" he turned sharply upon the whity-brown hope of the uncompromising Mrs. McClosky. "Take the horses up to the stable, and give 'em some water the first thing."

George's former sanctum was now used as a breakfast parlour and dining-room. Here, on chilly nights, the great wood-fire brightened and heated the little room. Here, during the long winter evenings of this month of June, George and Pauline used to sit on either side of the fireplace. Pauline liked to come into it from the dark outside, before the lamp was lighted, and watch the long worms of fire creeping about the glowing logs. She liked to see the wood ashes all lying in a state of incandescence. When the light came in, the ashes would turn to a dirty white, and the fiery worms would cease to frolic round the charred stumps.

This evening she was longer than usual in taking off her habit, being filled with a foreboding she could not dispel. There was nothing to reassure her when at last she gathered courage to enter the little parlour.

George was sitting in his arm-chair in the dark room, moodily looking into the wood fire before him. Pauline came and stood near him, with her elbow leaning on the low mantelshelf. He looked gloomily up at her pale expectant face. He was not given to studying the effects of light and shade, but he could not help noticing the transparency of tint thrown upon her skin by the reflection of the flickering flames. He noticed, too, with a different sort of sensation, that there was a half guilty look of nervous apprehension in the expression of the dark eyes.



Pauline was beginning to feel the oppression of the silence almost unendurable.

"Shall we have tea, George?" in a conciliatory tone. "Shall I ring for Mrs. McClosky and tell her to bring in the lamp?"

Her attempt to talk unconstrainedly was a failure. People do fail, as a rule, when they try to be at ease. The very term, to try to be at ease, carries a contradiction on the face of it.

"No! I don't want the lamp. Much good the lamp'll do me."

He leaned his elbows on his knees, and kept his face covered with his hands.

"What is the matter, George?" Pauline could be braver now that the action might be said to have commenced. "If you don't explain how am I to know? Tell me, have you got a headache?"

"By the Lord!" said George, suddenly looking up, and seizing her fiercely by the two wrists, "I believe sometimes I haven't made you out yet. I took it into my head you were the veriest sucking dove I ever came across. If I thought different"——

His hold on her wrists had become such a grip of iron that Pauline seemed to feel the bones shrinking under the pressure. She could not withhold a gasp of pain.

"You're hurting me, George, so much. I can't speak while you're hurting me so. Let go my wrists, and I'll speak."

"I'll let them go when you've answered me, not before. I've never had but one opinion of you till now; but if I thought you were up to any underhand sort of game, I'd make it the worse for you, if I had to shoot myself for it afterwards!"

"What do you mean?" she whispered, her lips becoming white as she spoke.

"This is what I mean!" he said. Always retaining his grasp of her wrists, he pulled her on to her knees before him, and looked closely at her eyes, dilated with terror. "Will you tell me you never saw that man before?"

She shrank from him a little before replying, "What man?"

"What man!" he repeated, with so contemptuous a



ring in his voice that Pauline winced under it even more than under the grip; "I think you're a liar after all! Well?"

"Yes;" he saw her lips form the word, but no sound came from them.

"Where?" unconsciously he was tightening his grasp.

"That morning, of course—on the plains."

She said it doggedly. Her first impulse had been to cry out, "Oh, George, he is my father, and in trouble!"—upon which George would have found himself in an agony of pity and contrition, and would have guarded the secret every bit as jealously as Pauline herself. But George, by his violence, was defeating his own ends. The next impulse was to keep her word to her father at any cost, and to prove to her own satisfaction and to George's that nothing should be wrenched out of her by such means as these.

"Only on the plains," said George, loosening his hold and looking his hardest at her face. "I'm not such a chump of wood as you take me for. What did he take your hand for, and cover you with flour, when I wasn't in the road? and why did you seem as if you didn't know which way to look when you were sitting in his chair there by the fire? Why didn't he give me a straightforward answer when I asked him where he'd been? Tell me that, if you can!"

"I don't know anything," said Pauline, pulling away her hands, and moving towards the bell; "I only know you're both foolish and cruel."

"Good heavens!" cried George, following her, "you know if I'm mistaken I'd kneel at your feet. There's nothing I wouldn't do, Pauline! I can't tell you how miserable I was all the time we were riding back—putting two and two together, and thinking of that cursed dream—I was nearly mad, I tell you! I won't ask you to forgive me, darling, if I've been wrong. But why should you even flirt with the fellow in a sort of way? It would be almost as bad to have you do a thing of that sort. I think I'm an unlucky wretch, whichever way I look at it; and I was so happy too!"

He turned away, and his tone of utter dejection moved Pauline more than his anger. She found her voice hard to control as she tried to explain.



"I never knew you were like that, George. Can't you trust me? Would you believe the least appearance against me?"

"No!" he answered, turning towards her again. "Not if it had been all square when we married. But I know you only gave me half your heart, if you gave me that, and of course"——

"Whatever I gave you," she interrupted quickly, "is consecrated to you. If you treat me so again, I shall be afraid to live with you!"

"I believe I'm mad," said George, beginning to recover himself. "I never want to feel that way again. Only I'd advise Master John Smith, or whatever he may choose to call himself, to give me a wide berth for the future."

George went out immediately after tea. Even now the fears prompted by his jealous demon were only half allayed. Pauline knew that he was taking the lantern up to the stables, and imagined that he must be solacing himself with the contemplation of the colt. She was left all alone in colloquy with her familiar and her bruised and swollen wrists. The station lamp burned badly, and she had no heart for reading. The uncertain light thrown out by the smouldering logs of red gum illuminated capriciously the different parts of the room. Sometimes throwing into deep shadow every object save Pauline herself, it crept up her grey dress, played inquisitively over her listless hands, ran along her profile in a strange white line. After bringing out her silhouette into strong relief it shot a sudden beam upon the opposite wall. The guns and native spears, an ancient tomahawk, a boomerang, and a waddy, ranged on projecting nails all over it, started into sudden prominence. Pauline thought curiously of the work done by the waddy before it had taken up its position upon the weather-stained walls of the Rubria homestead. Recalcitrant "gins" must have had little scope for expostulation after an admonishing tap from its butt end. Were savages often jealous? she wondered. As arraigned before her own conscience, not before George's, how did she stand? She had told the truth in the spirit if not in the letter. A Jesuit would have assured her that she had spoken the literal truth



She had never seen "Mr. Smith" more than once before. Guthrie Vyner was not Mr. Smith. In the sense moreover in which George had taken alarm, Pauline might contradict him with entire truthfulness. She would like to do whatever was right, but the right of late had seemed a thousand times more complicated than when she was at Beau-Séjour! At one minute she bowed her head in humiliation beyond endurance at the recollection of George's fierce suspicions, at another she remembered he had a cause for them, or believed he had a cause, which was tantamount to having one really. He had left her presence that evening with a worried, desperate look, such a look as she remembered on the face of a picture in her grandmother's drawing-room. The picture represented Charles IX. on the eve of the massacre of St. Bartholomew; not bloodthirsty, yet harassed, gloomy, full of forebodings of the tortures that his remorse would bring upon him later. Pauline would stoop to reassure George on his coming in again. Then she must find means of letting her father know the trouble to which she was exposed on his account. Of course he would make things clear.

"If grand'mère only knew!" thought the poor child, the tears starting into her eyes at the sudden yearning for the shelter of those comforting arms. Somewhere away in the blackness of the night, a distant curlew gave out its long wailing cry. Mrs. McClosky, in the kitchen outside, was upbraiding the patient McClosky in energetic Scotch. Pauline could not believe that only a few months back she had been sitting in the haven of Beau-Séjour, unthinking of a world beyond it. What social problems had she not dared to discuss with madame? What schemes, that if carried out, should have elevated all humanity at a jump? She, who had not fathomed—who did not as yet comprehend one single passion of the human heart! She felt older now than Madame Delaunay herself. Well, the comforting reflection after all remained—Chubby was safe! It was the strongest proof of Pauline's love for the child that no desolation, no disappointment, could make her feel that the sacrifice, had it been necessary, was too great for the gain. As to its necessity, her familiar might suggest doubts and misgivings, might remind her of her grandmother's appeals,



but could not take from her the conviction that Chubby's bodily preservation was the paramount consideration.

While she was thinking this her husband came in.

"George," she said, putting out her hand, "aren't you sorry?"

He kissed the hand, but made no answer.

"Do say something, George!"

"Either I'm a brute," he said, "and you mustn't speak to me, or you're too clever for me—that's about it. God knows, I'd rather think I'm a brute."

"No! not a brute; only you jump at conclusions—rather! I think that's a privilege that ought to belong to me—not to you. You're not going to develop into a jealous husband, George? A sort of scowling Bluebeard! You're too fair for it. I can't remember any jealous husband but Othello. You don't look a bit like an Othello!"

"Oh yes," said George, only half appeased, "you're a fine one to chaff; you wouldn't be so ready with it if you knew what I'd been feeling all the evening!"

"Well, don't feel it any more!"

"Do you suppose I feel it for my own pleasure?" he asked, kneeling on the hearthrug at her side and kissing her hands again.

"There's no occasion to feel it at all, as you know. Where have you been all this time?"

"Thinking over things in the stable."

"Looking at the colt, I suppose that means. Is he going on as you wish?"

"Oh, he's fit; but I wasn't thinking much of the colt, I tell you."

"What race is he to run in, George?"

"Well, I expect to enter him for the Melbourne Cup after the next. He's only a youngster yet, you know, but take my tip for it, he's a beauty!"

"And if you lose? I don't like to pretend to warn you, because I know so little about things of that sort, but I've always heard it costs so much to race horses. One hears about people with such heaps of money in England losing it all, and then people say 'Oh, he went on the Turf; what can you expect?'"

"I'm going to take my chance about that. If I get a haul it'll be worth all the risk. If I don't, well,



a few hundreds won't make me or break me. I must do that or turn out of Rubria, one or the other."

"Why, you've plenty of money, George!"

"What I've got is all invested in the station. If we sold out now, I believe I'd be ruined. 'Pon my word, it's enough to make one ill to ride over the place; and I think this drought'll last too. Well, we'll all be in the same box, that's one thing—euchred up, my dear!—the whole lot of us."

"Has it ever been like this before?"

"No, not altogether. We've had our bad seasons, of course. Now, I tell you, out of fifty thousand sheep on this run, I'm bothered if there'll be one left us at all before long at this rate."

"What would you do if we were ruined?"

"Oh, I'd string on somehow until the old man gave us a lift. *You* shall never want, my old woman, never fear! I'd do with a crust to keep you like a lady."

"Thank you, George! but I think I could work too."

She is already concocting a plan by means of which ruin shall mean a little cottage close to Beau-Séjour. It would mean Beau-Séjour itself, only Pauline knows her husband would never live in the same house with her grandmother. Ruin shall bring Chubby to her side every day. The most cheerful aspect her familiar has ever worn, since she has been in the habit of carrying it off for the night, is on this particular evening when her husband has been threatening her with "ruin."



## CHAPTER XVII.

### *JOSIAH COMES TO RECONNOITRE.*

“For villainie maketh villainie  
And by his deeds a chorl is seine.”—CHAUCER.

THE spirit of spring, so grudgingly welcomed by the unchanging Victorian landscape, was abroad on the Murray plains. Each and every member of the frowning Eucalyptus tribe repelled its timid caresses, but at Rubria the rose-bushes and fig-trees in the little longitudinal garden greeted the advances of the emigrant with opening buds. If spring-time had not been so completely run to earth by every poet from antiquity upwards, here would be a fitting occasion for dwelling upon the smiles with which Mother Earth encourages the renewal of physical life on her surface. But an Australian spring is not as the spring of Mrs. Hemans and Tennyson. Neither one nor the other would have been inspired to sing about “the winds which tell of the violets’ birth” or about “pulses thronged with the fulness of the spring” in Australia.

Spring-time at Rubria, and a sun which chased Pauline indoors when George called her out to look at the colt. The only trace of spring, indeed, was to be seen in the lustre of Victory’s coat. Pauline liked to stand under the shade of the back verandah and watch the metallic gleams that played about his neck and shoulders in the sunlight. It was sad to turn from the contemplation of the glancing rays that seemed to radiate from Victory’s shiny back to the contemplation of the scorched dead grass he was standing on. The eternal refrain that Pauline heard from morning until night was the drought, and nothing but the drought. Matters were beginning to look serious for the squatters. Pauline thought it a pity that after the sun, according to the latest theories extant,



had been at such pains to send out his rays and set all the wood tissues to work in the building up of such vegetation as there was—he should overdo the thing so completely for lack of a little moderation. She began to be of the same mind as the negro who preferred the moon, on the score of its being more useful than the sun—shining of a dark night, and not in the daylight, when it wasn't wanted.

That the sun wasn't wanted on the Murray plains, people told each other daily and hourly. The white squatter and the coffee-coloured Chinese gardener made it each in his way the subject of a religious rite. Both were equally ready to do anything in reason in the way of propitiation. The Chinese to let off unlimited crackers, as being more calculated to excite attention up above; the Europeans to forego beef and mutton for a whole day, and starve upon Murray cod.

Josiah Carp, in his turn, called down maledictions on the weather as he read the country telegrams on his way from Wattle Villa to Melbourne in the train. It was a long time since he had made a condemnatory tour among his landed properties and stations. He sat in his cool office in Flinders Street one morning, and decided in his own mind that he would start for Rubria the very next day. He would so lay his plans that a letter announcing his arrival should reach his nephew the day after he had himself arrived. Thus he would secure the ends he had in view. He would discover whether Pauline had turned the homestead inside out—whether she carried about in the bush that air of innocent resignation which characterised her in town—whether George kept open house—whether he got on with his wife—whether he was keeping a racehorse—whether the interests of Messrs. Cavil & Carp were looked after with due regard to the well-being of the firm.

These reflections imparted so much of sinister meaning to Josiah's eyes, that a timorous clerk who had put his head through the half-open door pulled it away and concluded to put it in again at some later period of the day.

That he might the better carry out his contrivance, Josiah started the same evening instead of the next morning. It was his rule to take as little luggage as possible on these occasions, that his servants might expect



him back the sooner. He told his coachman in getting out of his carriage at the Spencer Street station that he would be back in a couple of days. Then he stretched himself in comfort on the vacant side of a saloon carriage, discomposed an old lady opposite, who was comforting herself with pork sandwiches in this early stage of the journey, by glaring at her as if she had come by them dishonestly, and finally snored himself to sleep. Half a night at Sandhurst and a halt at Echuca lengthened the trip considerably. It was not until the afternoon of the second day after his departure that Mr. Carp reached the little township of Rubria.

A word about Rubria. It was typical of a hundred other insignificant Victorian townships, turned out after the same pattern. Be they the centres of mining or of squatting populations, all share in common a few prominent characteristics. An abnormally wide street—in the case of Rubria still in the embryo stage—lively, as a thoroughfare for bullock drays, geese, and travelling flocks of sheep. Buildings, mostly of wood, mostly without an upper storey, all equally protected by a verandah, ranged in the following order. Hotel—general store—blacksmith's shop—hotel—butcher's shop—hotel—small post-office, grafted on to a depressed draper's establishment—hotel—baker's shop—hotel—hotel—hotel. It must be premised that every public-house, inn, beer shop, or grog shanty, is called an hotel in Victoria. The principal hotel is generally the station for Cobb & Co's. coaches, which jerk and rattle over the bush roads for hundreds of miles around.

Josiah's bones ached after eight hours' bumping in one of these, despite the liberality of Nature in affording them so ample a covering. He dismounted laboriously at the door of the hotel, handed over his portmanteau to a waiter, and demanded that a buggy and man should be provided for him, that he might drive over at once to the homestead of Rubria.

"Very sorry, Mr. Carp," said the man, shifting the portmanteau from one hand to the other—he was a bush waiter, and therefore didn't say sir—"a party's been and hired the buggy not an hour back. Didn't say when he'd be back either."

Josiah scowled, and reflected that he would do the



distance on foot. It was only eight miles, and his walking powers were his boast. He would walk off his stiffness; he would be the better able perhaps to make his observations. The upshot of it was that he started on foot. How he arrived, and how he disposed of his portmanteau, we shall presently see.

It so happened that for the first time in her experience Pauline was alone at home that day. She had seen George start in the morning for a shepherd's hut in a distant part of the run; he was not to return until dark—so it was understood—and Pauline, left to make the most of her isolation and her familiar, considered what she should do. So far she had never dared to unpack her box of relics and mementoes of her Beau-Séjour life. It occurred to her this morning that she would transform the dreary front parlour into a habitable room, and fill it with objects which should evoke memories of Beau-Séjour and speak to her of her grandmother and Chubby at every turn.

In good earnest she prepared to set to work, turning up her sleeves and baring her white arms, pinning a towel in nun-like fashion across her head and shoulders, and tucking up the skirt of her holland dress, as she had seen Madame Delaunay's Jane do on occasions of great cleaning up. Then she made her way to the front parlour, mentally soliloquising all the time she was at work.

"Some day," she thought, beginning operations by vigorously shaking the blinds and curtains, "I hope I shall look back upon this first part of my married life as the worst part of it—half these chairs must go away, at least; still I don't see what the future is to do for us—what a hopeless combination of wall and carpet, to be sure, beetroot and cabbage green. Will it bring different feelings, even if it brings no change in the outer life, I wonder? People are so fond of telling one happiness is all within one's self. I don't think so; I don't find it so. (That table looks as if it had grown out of that green patch in the centre: I must drag it towards the windows and plant it between them.) If it were so, why should not everybody live alone? Happiness is much more dependent upon one's relations with the people about one than upon one's self, I think. But where is the use of *aiming* at happiness after all? I never thought about it at Beau-Séjour, which proves that it was there,



I suppose. Who *is* happy who thinks about anything at all? That daub of a picture must go. I will hang Chubby's smiling face up there instead. What a long time since I have seen my father! I know he is well; I know nothing more, excepting that he cannot care for me much. I would have sacrificed my pride and my secret a hundred times over if his case had been mine. Ever since that one wretched evening, selectors and selectors' huts have been a sort of tabooed subject between George and me. Now, let me see: Mrs. McClosky will look either covert antagonism at my arrangements, or she will look as if she were making allowances for me, which is worse. I am taller than she is—half a head at least. I'm supposed to be her mistress. Why can't I go into the kitchen, and look perfectly unconstrained, and say, 'Mrs. McClosky! I am making a little change in the arrangements inside. I want you to clean the windows in the front room, and—give me a duster, please'! I shall rehearse it going down the passage."

To rehearse and to come before your audience are two distinct things. Mrs. McClosky's hard Scotch face only looked up from the potatoes she was peeling, and Pauline lost her cue.

"If you will give me a duster, please, Mrs. McClosky! and—and—I think there are too many chairs in the front parlour. I think I'll take it in hand."

"Ech! Mistress Drafton," replied Mrs. McClosky, with unflinching severity of tone, "ye'll tak' mair than that in hand, I'm thinkin'—ye'll tak' them in hand as micht ha' been your mither!"

Thereupon she handed over the duster with such an air of forgiveness that Pauline postponed saying anything about the windows.

Lest it should appear that my heroine was of a lachrymose tendency, it may be as well to pass over the interval employed in the arranging of all her childhood's treasures. Every successive year of her life had been marked by tokens of her grandmother's watchful love. One might have traced the progress of her mind from the period of happy credulity through stages of awakening and questioning only by looking at the piles of books inscribed with her name. There were all sorts of tender wordings on the fly-leaves.



“Pour une petite Curieuse”—“A ma chere fillette”—“Pour l’enfant gâtée de sa Bonne-maman.” What impossible delight “Folk-Lore” had once on a time afforded her! Before Chubby was born she had spent half her time with the pranksome little beings therein described. How well Madame Delaunay had known when the acceptance of earth as earth, and flesh as flesh, had changed into the longing to know the *before* of the earth and the before of the flesh. Then natural science had seemed to bring so many other things in its train. Before the wonder had come, of what avail to foster the wonder? But once awakened by natural impulse, it is inexhaustible, even as the means of gratifying it are inexhaustible. The more it is fed, the more it asks, because to feed it increases its power of asking—proving thereby that the difference between corporeal and spiritual hunger is as the difference between body and soul—the one finite, the other infinite. Next to a volume of Victor Hugo’s tragedies, Pauline found an album given to her by madame only a few weeks before George had come to Sydney. She could not help smiling to herself as she opened it, and saw the first effort that was to herald her maturer productions. The poor effort stood unsupported, with its erasures and errors, on the first page. It had heralded nothing but a blank, and as Pauline turned over the unsoiled tinted pages, she thought her mind had become as blank as these. The lines had been written when the force theory had taken strong hold of her imagination, and she remembered that, at the time of writing them, she had believed herself to be thinking, with an almost Byronic intensity of gloom, about the mysterious end of unasked-for existence—then had thrown down the pencil at Chubby’s call, and raced him to the sea-shore, where they had thrown stranded star-fish back into the water with much zest.

The lines had come to an abrupt halt. She read them over now to herself, half-pityingly, half-disdainfully—

“I wish my thoughts might ripple forth in song,  
Clothed in the brightest of bright imagery,  
That like well-favoured guests, who make their way  
Into the halls of monarchs’ palaces,  
They might find entrance into higher minds.  
Ah me! what vain endeavours do they make  
To struggle into utterance! How fruitlessly



The when, the why, the wherefore, day and night,  
With clamorous voice besiege my wearied brain !  
Relentless Force, monstrous like Proteus,  
Like Proteus multiplied a billion times,  
Assumes in me a self-tormenting shape,  
Excites the craving, and withholds the food.  
Must Force itself then never rest ? Alas !  
For ever and ever is it doomed to find  
New forms wherewith to toy inconsequently,  
Ever collect and re-collect the atoms,  
Awake them to a sense of suffering  
In consciousness of being—then disperse them !”

Pauline hesitated at the end whether to tear out the page, or to leave it in her book and lock it away. She locked it away—otherwise the lines could never have been transcribed here.

When the brick-dust of the wall had been toned down by photographs and palm-leaf fans—when the table was covered with her books and the mantelpiece with ornaments—when she had dispersed the superfluity of stiff leather chairs about the room, and divested the remaining ones of a certain air of imbecile and hopeless expectancy, consequent upon their never being sat upon—she brought George’s easy-chair and her own favourite low seat from the little back room, and pleased herself by thinking how surprised George would be at the transformation she had effected.

Mrs. McClosky disturbed the current of her reflections by rapping smartly at the door. The good woman could not refrain from casting a furtive glance round the room before entering upon her business with a premonitory sniff.

“There’s a mon frae the ‘selection’ has a word to say wi’ ye, Mrs. Drafton !”

“Oh, is there ?” cried Pauline, starting up. “Where is he ? I’ll come at once.”

She ran down the passage in the full expectation of seeing her father. It was a disappointment when Pulver greeted her in his strangled voice.

“Steady, boys—steady !” he croaked, pulling at the usual lock with more than the usual effect, and turning the benignant currants upon Pauline. Then twisting them round with sudden dexterity to assure himself that Mrs. McClosky was not within hearing, he put both hands on either side of his mouth, as if he were speaking through a trumpet, and hoarsely whispered—



"Struck our colours! Leave port to-morrow!"

"To-morrow! Are you going away to-morrow?" she asked, not quite understanding him. "Where?"

"My orders — are — to say — nothing," said Pulver, speaking in gasps through his imaginary trumpet. "I seen—your man—cruising round—this morning. I bore—down—upon you—without orders."

"Oh dear," said Pauline, perplexed, "that can't be! But I'm so glad you came. I'll come—I'll come this afternoon, without fail."

After Pulver is gone Pauline reflects at length upon the risk she is incurring, not with the most far-off idea of abandoning her project, but rather by way of providing herself against unforeseen discovery. It has become a matter of course that Pauline should ride or drive every afternoon, never, until now, without George; but there can be no reason why, when George is away, she should not order her horse to be saddled and go out riding by herself. She weighs all the probabilities of his coming back early and riding to meet her as she is returning home by the river. She pictures with a shudder his expression if he should take it into his head to ride after her to the selector's hut. Everything for the last few months has been so peaceful at the station!

Mr. John Smith's name has fallen into disuse. Only when Pauline has been out on the run with George, she has chanced to see Pulver sometimes on his way to the township. She knows that her father is well, and that though he will forgive her for never coming to see him, he would not forgive her for risking, either by speech or letter, the betrayal of his secret. But she cannot let him go now without a little more certain knowledge of his probable fate. He is her father after all. During that long period at Beau-Séjour, when nothing had been heard of him, Pauline had been quite content to let matters take their course, taking it for granted that he was at sea and could not write. "No news is good news," is so easy of application when we have no heart interest in the person from whom news is deficient. How different the case would have been if madame or Chubby had neglected to write! No news then would have meant sleepless nights and dragged-out, weary days.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### JOSIAH'S DISCOVERY.

"'Tis good to doubt the worst,  
We may in our belief be too secure."

—WEBSTER AND ROWLEY.

WHATEVER may be the dual nature of our brains, it is next to impossible to think intently of more than one thing at a time. When Pauline sallies forth on Mulatto this afternoon, resisting all suggestions that a man or boy should follow her as a groom, every thought, every feeling is absorbed in the desire to see her father, and to see him without her husband's knowledge. With any other object in view, she must have delighted in the sense of freedom and liberty. All the plain for her own, and Mulatto at one with her in his desire to stretch his length across it.

So carefully has he been broken in by George, that he never affects the homely jog-trot peculiar to all Australian horses—an idiosyncrasy which renders them specially valuable to people with "livers." Stable fed, and daily groomed, answering to her lightest touch, Mulatto would have borne Pauline down the crowded Row in Hyde Park with as fleet a grace as here by the desolate Murray in the wilds of Victoria. Mulatto is tranquil, but his rider is scared. From behind dead trunks, in patches of scrub on all sides, George's eyes seem to confront her.

The far-off haven of the hut looms in sight at last. There stands the selector's cart, packed almost as Pauline remembers it at first, close to the door. The farm implements are gone. If it were not for the open door, Pauline would believe that she had come in vain, and that her father had gone away in his desire to avoid her. She does not think so, however, when she has dismounted and put her arms round his neck, and when she has heard him speak to her for almost the first time in her



life as a father might speak to his child. If she should never see him again, if in his remoter hiding-place he should hide himself away from her presence for ever, if he should be restored to his position, and taking another wife, and bestowing his love upon other children, should forget the existence of his first-born as he had forgotten it before, Pauline will at least have this to remember—that he has shown, in this last interview, some tenderness of affection for her, some anxiety for her happiness, some return of the fatherly impulse which prompted him to kiss her as she lay at his feet and looked up into his face with dreamily-loving eyes. “A thousand times worth the risk!” she thinks, as with pale subdued face she stands at the door and gives him her last embrace. Poor Pulver too must have a parting message, and Pulver is without doubt settling accounts at the township with wheezy self-importance.

Neither father nor daughter, standing in the full light of the bronze-hued sunset, are aware of two pairs of eyes fixedly regarding them from the tangle of scrub by the river. One of these is a pair of gleaming steely-blue eyes, the other a pair of reddish-black, yellow-white, bloodshot eyes. As the selector helps her on to her saddle, and for the last, the very last time, the girl bends down her head and encircles her father’s neck with her arm, the steely-blue eyes grow lurid with evil intent. As the horse starts off, the steely-blue eyes follow with a fierce stare the pretty downcast head of the rider, reflecting back the rich copper-coloured rays of the fast disappearing sun; as the sad outline of the selector remains in the doorway the steely-blue eyes glare angrily at the white hand uplifted to his forehead.

When the horse is gone, and the selector’s door is closed, the steely-blue eyes turn their burning glance with diabolical meaning upon their neighbour eyes. Those neighbour eyes are the mediums through which a dark soul, in an appropriately dark body, looks out upon the waste of which its possessor is the dethroned monarch.

King Cocky, in default of his usurped majesty, willing to do anything for a glass of grog, from joining in a corroborree to acting as retriever, and plunging after wild duck for a sporting squatter, has awkwardly shouldered Josiah’s portmanteau, and is carrying it to Rubria in



anticipation of a *pour-boire* of considerable magnitude. Since savages of all nations make their wives their beasts of burden, King Cocky is not as much at home with the portmanteau as his "lubra" would have been. He chuckles at the rest brought about by Josiah's inspection. In the waning light he has the air of a ghastly Guy Fawkes, or a knock-kneed but portly scarecrow set there to frighten the magpies.

"Who's place that, eh?" said Josiah, in a yell. "What you call that 'em 'ouse?"

"Baal me know," whined King Cocky. "Baal black fellow go long o' dat feller."

"Know that a one, eh?" yelled Josiah again, pointing a fat forefinger at the girl riding away in the dusk.

"O—o—o—oh, budgerie," howled King Cocky, drawing together his carnivorous lips, and opening them out suddenly in a snorting laugh.

"Hold your noise, will you—you fool?" shouted Josiah, livid. He trampled on with fierce haste through the scrub, lifting his short broad legs high at each stride, his whole body breathing the hateful triumph of his evil-dreaming mind.

But King Cocky had no trammels of designing women with faces like angels to discover and profit by. He had nothing but a portmanteau to carry, and an uncertain prospect of a fitting recompense for an effort so much at variance with his constitutional habits. He therefore came to an abrupt halt, and the portmanteau tumbled heavily at Josiah's feet. King Cocky was about to strike.

"This black fellow done long o' you. Baal want 'em job."

He shook his head deplorably, like a Hindu's monkey god whose china pate has been set wagging.

Josiah found an answer to the difficulty by the tender of half-a-crown.

"Come on—come on," he said. "Take 'em box. No gammon, now!"

Whether it was Josiah's decision, or the feel of the half-crown that influenced King Cocky, does not appear. His majesty clawed again at the portmanteau, and grunting some almost inarticulate sounds resembling "Burra-murra-burra," he shuffled along in Mr. Carp's rear.

Mulatto meanwhile was bearing Pauline home with



the speed of a Pegasus. If only, in imitation of Pegasus too, Mulatto's dainty hoofs could have called forth a fountain on the arid soil of Rubria, and set the water trickling across the parched plains, as it had trickled down the sides of Mount Helicon!

Pauline had hardly returned an hour, and was already making a candle-light survey of her arrangements of the morning, when she was warned by the barking of the dogs outside that somebody must be at hand. She knew that Veno and Lassie were making short runs backwards and forwards, and she waited for the clamorous yapping betokening that they wanted to be noticed. To Pauline's surprise, the barking assumed a tone of angry disappointment. She took up her candle, and went out into the passage to see what was the matter. Josiah was on the point of coming in by the back entrance. He was staggered at the daring assurance of the girl. There was no change whatever in the sweet candid eyes, looking with most innocent expectation out of the setting of the colourless face. How they had haunted him, those eyes! How often the determination to "find her out" had been shamed by their sad earnestness! Like "rare pale Margaret," she had a sort of fairy shield, and her shield warded off, not sorrow, but suspicion. She did not like Mr. Carp—she disliked him, indeed, more than any one she knew—but all questions of personal liking must remain in abeyance now that he was, in a sense, her guest. She came forward, holding a candlestick in one hand, a little flush of surprise mounting to her temples, a half smile of welcome parting her lips. Josiah felt a savage impulse to unmask her on the spot. What a fool she must think him—a still greater fool if she could only know what he had thought of her less than two hours ago.

"What a surprise, Mr. Carp!" she said, giving him her hand, then lighting him into the front room with candlestick held aloft. "Well, would you know it again?"

Josiah's heated eyeballs wandered round the walls. He hardly took in their details. The photographs were so many discoloured spots; the little ornaments, laid out with such care, small irregularities—nothing more.

"Where's your 'usband?" he asked thickly.

Pauline looked quickly at him with a sudden fear.



Could it be possible that Mr. Carp drank? She hardly knew that she was backing to the door in alarm as she answered him.

"George went away this morning. He has not come home yet. I expect him every minute."

Some demon prompted Josiah to say, "I needn't have been at the trouble of asking. 'When the cat's away'—eh, Mrs. D.? Now, you just look 'ere!"

He laid his hand on her sleeve. Veno and Lassie broke into a furious duet outside. Josiah started, and the dogs modified their bark into a howl of welcome. Pauline, unnaturally white, escaped from the room, and half ran down the passage to meet her husband. "Veno—poor old man!—was a good old dog, then!" she heard him say, but he did not stay to say any more. He came straight into the house, with the old fond expression of tender expectancy beaming out of his eyes, tired and sunburnt, and mightily impatient to greet his wife. Pauline had never been so glad to see him before. She let him kiss her there in the passage, and almost clung to him as he did so.

"Poor old woman!" said George. "You look quite ill, my darling! What's the matter?"

She had recovered herself by this time.

"I'm all right, George, only a little tired;" then in a whisper, "Mr. Carp's in there!"

"The devil he is!" said George. His eyebrows fell into their old trick of climbing up his forehead in his vexation. "When did he come?"

"Only a minute ago!" she replied. "You go into the room and speak to him. I'll go and tell Mrs. McClosky to see about getting the spare room ready."

All thought of the little surprise she had prepared was scared away. Thank heaven! George had come. If Mr. Carp were really tipsy (and Pauline's experience of tipsy people was so limited that her notions regarding them were somewhat mixed), George would soon find it out. Of course he would prevent her from coming into the room any more, and she would be saved from contact with that dreadful presence, from the lurid glare of those terrible eyes. She quailed at the recollection. She could not bear that the first person to come among her hallowed treasures



should be Josiah Carp. But to Pauline's astonishment, half-an-hour afterwards she found herself seated in the most natural way behind her tea-tray in the little back room. Mrs. McClosky gyrated between Mr. Carp and Mr. Drafton with grilled chops and ham and eggs, as uncertain to whom to accord the dish of honour, while the two men talked with that appearance of cordiality which springs from a desire on the part of people who dislike each other covertly to keep their dislikes to themselves.

George was ravenously hungry. Josiah professed to have dined just before starting.

"I come on foot," he said, "just to 'ave a look at the place. I don't see any signs of grass anywhere. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, why, Mahomet must go to the mountain. If the grass won't come to the sheep, why, the sheep must go to the grass. You'd better let 'em travel round. That's my opinion."

"And I can back it up," said George, abstracting a fourth chop from the dish. "That's the very thing I've been over to McGuinness about. He's a smart fellow that, mind you! 'Mr. Drafton,' he says, 'the sheep's dying by the score, and I can't save 'em.' Travel them round, say I, of course. There's another cove shepherding right away beyond Flinder's paddock. He'll be coming for his rations to-morrow. Then you can have a talk to him."

"By-the-bye," said Josiah, with a lowering side-glance at Pauline, "you never told me they were beginning to select about 'ere!"

"Oh—ah—yes!" answered George. An impulse he could not control directed his eyes to Pauline too. The tell-tale face was deepening in colour. The lips were trembling. George saw in it confusion at the remembrance of that evening of misery. Josiah saw the evidences of guilt. She was hardened, but not brazen-faced yet.

"A fellow called Smith," continued George, "and another. There's two of them at it; but they won't do much good with it anyhow."

"Not they," said Josiah, still scowling at Pauline; "they've done 'arm enough already—but it's a long lane that has no turning! A day of reckonin' 'll come. It'll come sooner than some people think for, I'll answer for that!"

George held out his cup for more tea, and gave his



wife the merest flash of a wink with the left eye. This by way of indicating his amusement at Josiah's wrath on the subject of free selectors.

"Oh, the men are right enough," he said; "one of them's an out and out gentleman. You can see that in half a minute."

"He's an out and out thief," said Josiah, his eyes almost bursting out of their sockets with rage; "but I'll 'ave the best of 'im yet, the infernal scoundrel!"

"What an old idiot," thought George, "to be so mad about a few paltry acres of worthless land. He'll have a fit of apoplexy if he doesn't look out. I'd better turn him on to the subject of Mr. Duffy. Pauline'll see then whether I've drawn the long bow about his temper or not."

Sir Gavan Duffy, not Sir Gavan in those days, but plain Mr. Duffy, had in this his period of power, marked among others Josiah's runs with the fatal blue colour, thereby leaving them open to the depredations of the selectors.

Mr. Duffy was in consequence Josiah's *bête noire*.

"You'd better hammer Mr. Duffy, I think, sir; he's the responsible party, isn't he?" Then seeing that his uncle was almost mute with exasperation, George addressed himself to his wife.

"You look dead beat, old woman. What have you been up to all day?"

"I am a little tired," she replied.

"What's made you tired?"

"Why, haven't you noticed all my work of transformation in the front room? I expected you to be overwhelmed with astonishment and rapture!"

"Yes, you've rigged it up as a sort of reception-room, I think; but nobody's likely to see it. Haven't you been out at all?"

It was of no use. Pauline could not look like her natural self when she had anything to conceal. Between the double pair of eyes she felt as between two fires.

"Yes," she made answer desperately; "I've been for a ride on Mulatto."

"Oh!" said George, raising his eyebrows; "where did you go?"

"Not far—at least not very far—along the river banks a little way!"

"You didn't go towards the township, then?"

"No, I didn't," said Pauline, feeling herself frightened



and goaded, and talking on at random. "If you like to get the plan of Rubria, I'll show you just where I went, and exactly where I stopped to make Mulatto jump a log, and exactly where I stopped to look at a black swan—and oh! do you know, George, I think something must be the matter with Victory, because as I was coming back through the yard little Alexander McClosky was leading him past the harness-room, and Victory didn't look a bit shiny, and—and he walked with his head poked forward so funnily—you can't think!"

How she delivered herself of this tirade she never knew. She only knew that within a few feet of her was a face that regarded her with eyes of malicious distrust and a mouth of sardonic expression. Still for the moment her end was gained.

"I wish you wouldn't talk about what you don't know anything about," exclaimed George peevishly—he regarded with a fear that was almost superstitious in its nature any hint, any rumours, affecting the well-being of the colt. "I'll go and have a look at him, I think."

"What's that you're talking of?" asked Josiah.

"A Panic colt," said George, rising as he spoke. "Oh, I know what I'm about; let me alone for that. He's worth double the money already. I wouldn't take six times what I gave for him; so there!"

"And what are you going to do with him?"

"That's my look-out. I bought him at my own risk. His feed costs me next to nothing. I'll make a good thing out of him one of these days, see if I don't."

George never failed to become excited when any allusions were made to Victory. He half approved, half blamed the candour of his own manner towards his uncle—a man who would die worth hundreds of thousands perhaps—and whose testamentary dispositions were known to nobody.

"But he won't get *me* to cotton to him, for all his money," said George to himself as he went out of the room.

A minute later and some fleet footsteps were overtaking his, as he swung the lantern backwards and forwards on his way to the stables.

"Why, Pauline! what brings you out after me, my old woman? Why don't you stay and do the amiable to the old man? He'll think it very queer you leaving him in that way!"



"Oh no, he won't," panted Pauline; "he's sitting in the arm-chair by the table in the back-room, the old arm-chair that I left there, you know. And he's lit his pipe, and I didn't take any of the *Arguses* away, so I know he doesn't want anything."

"He'll be pumping Mrs. McClosky; that's him all over," said George.

"Will he really? Does he descend so low as that? Besides, what can he want Mrs. McClosky to enlighten him about?"

"Oh, a whole lot of things. Much I care for his prying, that's all. You can say now, Pauline—straight—could my worst enemy accuse me of truckling to my uncle?"

"I think you're rather rude to him, on the contrary, George; and to what end after all?"

"No, I ain't," said George, adopting a tone of injured facetiousness. "Now, you little horsebreaker, we'll see what your opinion's worth about the colt!"

He unpadlocked the door, and entered Victory's straw-covered loose-box, followed by Pauline. He walked round the colt, looking at him critically from every point of view—holding the lantern low, and inspecting each one of Victory's shapely legs in turn. Pauline wished all possible good on Victory's behalf. If miraculously on this one particular night he could only have developed the slightest ailment, to pass away as miraculously the very next morning, Pauline would have been fonder of Victory than ever.

"Hang me if I didn't think for a minute he'd a swelling on the hock—on the off hind leg there!" said George—adopting stable phraseology the moment he found himself in the stables, and standing up again with reassured face. "I don't know what on earth you mean by giving me such a fright for nothing!"

"Well, I'm as glad as you are that there's nothing the matter," answered Pauline, putting an arm round the animal's neck. Victory rubbed his nose against her shoulder, and pushed forward his small head as if he were trying to bore it under her arm.

"Isn't he kind?" exclaimed George, supremely gratified at the *bon accord* between his two favourites. "I believe that colt loves you, upon my word I do!"

"I like feeling his skin; it's like stroking plush," said Pauline, caressing his neck.

"And just you look at it when I hold the lantern so,"



said George, making the light play over the alternate patches of velvety dark and glistening light across Victory's back. "What in the Lord's name could you mean by saying he looked sick? I never saw him look so fit in my life!"

"I suppose he was dusty, then," she murmured, hiding her face against the colt's neck. "I won't malign him any more, I promise."

"I like you to take notice of him, though, my old woman; it shows you keep an eye on my interests when I'm out of the road. I reckon on Victory to pull me through, I tell you, for I don't know what we're coming to with such a season as this."

"What is the worst that could happen, George?"

"That I should be up a tree, my dear, as high as a kite, without a feather to fly with. There's no selling out now; but things'll take a turn, I expect. So long as you stick to me, I care for nothing. Besides, the old man's bound to do something for us sooner or later. I say, you'd better go and look after him inside. It isn't the thing leaving him in that way. I'll go and shoot some 'possums for the dogs."

"Oh no, George," in a tone of alarm. "If you do, I shall go with you."

"What," said George, delighted, "you'd tramp about with me after the opossums! I was only joking, my darling. We'll have to go in and listen to some of Master Carp's preachings. But another night, if you'll come, I'll show you some sport. Now you're bound to give me a kiss after that."

Pauline despised herself heartily as she obeyed him. In word, in action, in thought, she had been deceiving him from the moment of his coming home to her. But her motive was pure! Her word to her father was sacred! All this might be; and yet, to learn that a woman's weapon is deceit, to practise her skill in using the weapon until it should become a familiar arm, easy to wield, this schooling was degrading, self-abasing. Better far feel as in the old Beau-Séjour days, when a thought not shared with madame, a scheme of which Chubby was not the innocent confidant and abettor, stood condemned, as unworthy the occupation of her mind.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### JOSIAH'S DREAM.

"True, I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy."

OUT upon the maxim which condemns alone the man of late dinners and heavy suppers to dreams and midnight visions! Emptiness and light-headedness, mated together, court the impalpable sprites of darkness. Have I not, in days long gone by, found atonement for the penalty of going supperless to bed by the prettiest and most alluring of nightly visitants? Far down in the black depths of the bolster have I not seen a solemn march of crystal sugar-loaves, contracting into shining balls as they travelled onwards? Knobs of candy, too, glittering like spar, that always evaded my willing hand? Such a Barmecide's feast was never spread before my tightly-shut eyes if virtuous weak tea, bread and butter, or bread and treacle, had comforted my inner infant at the nursery table.

Now Josiah Carp, though a man of amazing dinners, was not a man of dreams. Plethoric sleep was his nightly lot; yet on the especial occasion of his stay at Rubria, on the occasion of his finding no stomach for Mrs. McClosky's conscientious cookery, on the occasion of his thereby betaking himself fasting to his bed, he dreamed a dream; and in that to dream at all was a new experience to Mr. Carp, and in that his dream was of so astounding and prodigious a nature as to influence his waking actions, it must by no means be lightly regarded, but rather narrated in full, as one of those dreams that

"Leave a weight upon our waking thoughts."

It seemed, then, to Josiah in his dream, that he was again standing in the scrub with King Cocky by his side, but King Cocky's bloodshot eyes had grown redder



and more bloodshot until they glowed like two coals of living fire. His hands, always clutching at Josiah's portmanteau, had developed long tenacious claws, like the hands of the lovely lady in the "Ingoldsby Legends" who goes a-visiting among the abbots, and of whom it is said, when a drop of holy water fell on her, that "her hands turned to paws, with nasty great claws," &c.

Josiah felt uncomfortable, but he was not more astonished than we any of us are, in our dreams, when the horse we are riding turns into the footstool, or the cat repeats to us the substance of a parliamentary debate. Moreover, he was altogether too busy to pay much attention to his majesty's eyes or claws, for it seemed to him at the moment that he was wholly engrossed in the labour of beating the scrub with a stick in search of a diamond snake. Josiah had seen the undulating motion of the snake's back, and was quite dazzled by the multifarious colours reflected from it. In passing, be it remarked, it was somewhat early in the season for the appearance of diamond snakes, or, for the matter of that, of snakes of any kind whatever. Josiah, however, did not reflect upon probabilities of this nature. We think nothing in a dream of eclipsing the sun, or of taking a jump into all the seasons in turn. But, for all his beating of the scrub, Josiah could not find the snake; nevertheless he could hear its tail thumping the ground with a sound like that of horses' hoofs upon the turf. At last King Cocky laid a hand, or more properly a claw, upon his arm. Josiah's funny-bone seemed to shrivel up at the contact, but his arm was directed aright; with supernatural power he thrust forward a hand and seized the snake by the neck. Again, let it be remarked, Josiah was the last man in the world to lay hold of a snake in his waking moments—which did not prevent him in his dream from holding it tightly by the neck and endeavouring to strangle it. Strange to say, it twined its flexible body round his arm, and looked straight out of its narrow head with Pauline's eyes. Darkly and softly, though defiantly withal, they looked full into his. His hands seemed powerless. They could not exert any pressure; and while he was hesitating, a great roar of seething, rushing water sounded in his ear. In another instant the river Murray had risen above its



banks, and was sweeping towards him across the thirsting plain with muddy might. So he threw up his arms for safety, and the diamond snake slipped through his hands. But while his head was still above the water, he could see the snake pushing its way through the tossing flood with lissome joints. And high above the water, clean and dry, he could see the roof of the selector's hut. Before the water rose above his head, he had yet time to descry the same figure that he had seen the night before, but now it was on the roof, waiting with white hand extended to draw the snake to its bosom. Then Josiah tried to shout, but no voice would come from his contracted throat; only King Cocky's hand was laid again on his shoulder, the long nails dug themselves into his very flesh. King Cocky laughed, as he had laughed the night before, and with the sound of this laugh penetrating his brain, with the smart of the heated claws against his arm, Josiah woke groaning. His forehead and temples were quite wet. His arm was cramped. His mouth was open with terror. He lay still after his dream, marking each sound that brought a promise of morning, oppressed by a fear that made him unknown to himself. It was a long time before the first white ray forced its way through the cracks round the ill-fitting window-frame. Josiah had never so welcomed a ray before. The darkness had not been accompanied by utter stillness. All through the night a cantankerous native cat had been scratching, sneezing, and hissing on the roof. No Banshee could have uttered a more desolate wail than the sad curlew. One would have imagined a lost spirit to be wandering over the plains.

So soon, however, as the ground-larks twittered and the jackasses set to out-laughing each other—above all, when the cheerful, reckless note of joyous independence sounded from the early-rising magpies, Josiah's courage—it never had been of a very daring description—partially returned to him. Girl or serpent, Pauline was not going to get the better of him. If she wanted to secure his secrecy, he would dictate his own terms. She might fool her own husband. Happily Josiah was not a man to be fooled. His dream determined him; there was no time to be lost. He would watch his opportunity; he would make her feel his power that very day.



Morning in full sets all the station-hands to work. No one but feels that Mr. Carp's eyes may not be watching him furtively from behind a blind. Mrs. McClosky makes a parade of banging the rugs precisely beneath his window, that she may impress him with her industrial energy. Little Alexander McClosky, tutored by George, leads the colt into unaccustomed paths for his morning walk. It is not expedient that Victory should be flaunted in Mr. Carp's face. The docile McClosky, instructed by his wife, shoulders logs, and sweeps round the wood-heap, as if Josiah were about to dance "mulberry bush" around it. The boundary rider is astir before sunrise, and away on his astonished horse at the hour when his sleep is wont to be of the sweetest. Two swagmen creep away in the early light. Odd hands, normally kept from the mischief which Dr. Watts has informed us to be held in readiness by Satan for all unemployed digits by jobs in the fencing, butchering, grooming, or shepherding line, find ready-to-hand tasks with inventive ingenuity.

Perhaps the little Rubria world would be less on the alert could it divine the exceptional frame of mind of its part—and larger part—possessor. Josiah neither stalks round the outbuildings nor rates the men after his usual fashion. He sits through the breakfast hour with abstracted brow, answering by short monosyllables George's suggestive scraps of information respecting the sheep and the cattle. George has in fact so much of the conversation to sustain that it assumes (if such a word is permissible) a soliloquistic character. Pauline concentrates her whole attention on the tea and the coffee, passes the toast and the butter, and remains absorbed in the contemplation of her plate. She is calculating on the arrival of a budget of Beau-Séjour news. Somebody will surely ride to the township for the letters before the day is over. With such a prospect in store, even Mr. Carp's presence cannot depress her; even the inevitable certainty that she will be called upon to listen to proverbs, to warnings, to a gloomy forecast of the consequences of the drought, seems less appalling from a morning point of view. She has made up her mind that Josiah must have been tired and excited the night before, and that to attach any importance to his peculiarities is to make them of more importance than they are worth. Provided



he only goes away soon; and George has told her Mr. Carp only stays long enough to make everybody uncomfortable. He has accomplished this so quickly in her case that, calculating the number of people there are on the station, and the number of hours there are in a day, she may hope to see Josiah take his departure before the arrival of the night.

"There now," says George, when he has breakfasted and talked his fill, "I'm off. I've got some cattle to brand this morning. There's that imported cow you sent up last week, and a lot of heifers. I'll do it straight off the reel, if you'll come out now and have a look at them. We can ride round afterwards, if you like."

"I'm in no 'urry," replies Mr. Carp ambiguously. "A bad thing, you know, to 'urry after meals."

"Yes; but," expostulated George, marvelling at this new freak on the part of his bustling uncle, "I've got the cattle all yarded. It's just outside here, you know. It's no distance."

"All right, all right. There's no eye like the master's eye," says Josiah testily, following George out of the room without much show of alacrity.

But when the work of branding has fairly begun, George on looking round is surprised to see that his uncle's post of observation by the fence is empty and "knows him not."

"Of all the rum sticks!" thinks George to himself, flourishing his brand. It is a misfortune for the guileless heifers, that absence of Mr. Carp. George unwittingly visits his perplexity upon them, digging his red-hot instrument of torture with such unwonted severity into their defenceless flanks that a ghastly odour of roast beef spreads itself around.

An Abyssinian would have been maddened by the smell, and must needs have brandished his knife over the wound. As for the heifers, they raised their pitiful cries of concern all unheeded.

Josiah had waited until his nephew was in full swing. Then, careless alike of imported cows, heifers, and foals, he had stealthily walked back to the house. Both front and back doors stood wide open, and the sunlight came streaming half-way down the passage. Josiah went through into the verandah, where he lit his pipe, the better to arrange his plan of action; then, pacing up and down along its narrow length, he proceeded to make his observations.



One of the windows of the front parlour, freshly curtained by Pauline, stood wide open. Behind it sat Pauline herself. All the defensive weapons wherewith she kept her familiar at bay were ranged on the window-sill in front of her. There were strips of black cloth lying in the neighbourhood of a heap of brightly-tinted silks—known to such as are versed in the handicraft of fancy-work as “floss silk.” There was a book—held open by a miniature pair of scissors, and adroitly arranged with a view to enabling her to carry on the double operation of stitching and reading. First a line—then a stitch; two lines—two stitches. When a verse of the poem, whereat the book lies open, is committed to heart, there comes an unlimited number of stitches. But accounts must be squared between the stripes and the verses, or the familiar cannot be said to have been properly fought by both fingers and brain.

This is the task to which Pauline has betaken herself when she has seen Mr. Carp’s broad back, in company with her husband’s slim one, making for the cattle-yards after breakfast. It is a pleasant work-inspiring morning. The sun seems just a little shame-faced for once in a way, and is shining in an abashed manner through a hazy mist. No dust, no hot winds, no flies, no mosquitoes in this early stage of the season. Nothing but a warm dry air within and without. In the garden, leaves visibly unfolding themselves, green and gold ground-parrots rustling busily among the low-lying hyacinths and jonquils, tiny shell-parrots chirruping perkily to each other from among the boughs of the fig-trees. Pauline is beginning to be aware of the enlivening sense of their companionship, when the heavy tread of Josiah’s feet, so easily distinguishable from her husband’s springy footstep, strikes a chill to her heart. What can he want? Why does he pursue her? She had been in such peaceful enjoyment of her strips of cloth and her verses, and the twittering and pecking outside. “But I shall try to let it make no difference,” thinks Pauline, with her heart beating disagreeably nevertheless. “Why should I be such a self-conscious fool as to find it almost impossible to go on with my work or attend to my book because Mr. Carp chooses the verandah to smoke and spit in?” She draws her head a little farther in, and says over to



herself in audible tones, with lips that hardly move, the verse she has been learning by heart—

“He hath outsoared the shadow of our night,  
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain;  
And that unrest, which men miscall delight,  
Can touch him not”——

“I simply can’t go on. Mr. Carp looks like the Calumny come in tangible form. If he comes past the window again I shall go.”

And Mr. Carp comes to the window again, though he does not pass it, and Pauline does not go.

Truth to tell, Josiah had inwardly determined that each turn should be his last. He had waited for an opportunity of this sort from the time of his rising in the morning, flushed and feverish from the effects of his dream. What power, short of a supernatural agency, such a power as had overcome him in the night, made it so impossible for him to walk up to the window and confront this girl, so completely in his hands? It had been as difficult to grasp the diamond snake of his dream between his paralysed fingers as it now seemed to find form of speech for the thoughts that were besetting him. And why? Josiah raged within himself as he asked—why? A downcast head, casting back, like the skin of the snake, bright reflections from its ropy coils, a pale smooth face creamy of texture, crimson-hued lips, eyes dropt over the book—what repellent magic could there be in so fair a picture as this? The more innocent the eyes, the greater their guilt. Josiah had bullied his clerks, his nephew, his defunct wife, his servants—all his life long—with or without reason. Was he going to quail before a single solitary woman, whom he could bring to his feet with a prayer for mercy by a word? Were not his eyes and his ears to be relied upon? With his eyes—and Josiah had good reason to know that they were far-seeing ones—he had beheld the evidences of her guilt; with his ears, only the night before, he had heard her lie and prevaricate to her husband. Let her be ever so childlike in aspect, she must be old in deceit. She was moving now—now she was gathering up her silks. Josiah swore she should not escape him. He tramped to the window with his pipe in his mouth, leaning his two arms on the sill and looking at her strangely.



"He is more than ever like the wolf in Red Riding Hood," says Pauline to herself, folding up her strips without looking at him; "and he is smoking in front of my face, too. I should like to see grand'mère's expression if she were here."

She lays hold of her heap of silks and half rises from her chair. Josiah puts out a detaining hand.

"Don't you go, Mrs. D.! I've something particular to say to you."

"Yes, Mr. Carp; what is it?"

The tone of her voice might have frozen the air over a crater. She sits with starch uprightness in her chair, at most anticipating a long-winded discourse on the error of George's ways. In this case Pauline will rebel. It is not seemly that she should listen to treason against her husband.

Still nothing but silence ensues. The tapping of the collie's tail on the verandah outside, the fussy pecking of the parrots in the boughs, are the only sounds to be heard. She makes a fresh effort to move.

"Stop a minute, Mrs. D.!" Josiah's trembling fingers clutch at the strips of cloth. He hardly knows what he is talking about as he fumbles with them. "What sort o' work do you call this?"

"You won't be very wise even when I've enlightened you," replies Pauline, wondrously relieved to find that the communication is to bear upon fancy-work. "It's a kind of 'applique,' and I'm certain you haven't the vaguest idea what that means; have you? You stitch bits of velvet on to these strips of cloth with coloured silks. Grand'mère—my grandmother, I mean—taught it me. It's a foreign stitch, I think."

Josiah lays hold of the only word in the reply which seems to have caught his attention. "Yes," he says huskily, "foreigners are a bad lot!"

A disdainful little smile at what Pauline considers an ill-timed joke passes very quickly across her face. She has not descended so low as to defend the merits of her grandmother or her grandmother's nationality from Mr. Carp's insinuations.

Josiah is anathematising his own folly for allowing the minutes to slip by without speaking. He lays down his pipe before him on the sill, and, unable to look Pauline in the face, pulls out his tobacco and his pocket-knife.



"You 'eard what I said?" he asks, hacking viciously at his square of tobacco, and just darting a glance of inquiry at her face.

"Yes."

"There's many a true word been spoken in jest." If Josiah were at death's door, he would greet the King of Terrors with a truism of the kind.

Still it is evident that a conversation conducted upon such principles as these must flag. Again Pauline makes a move for the door.

"Stop a minute, Mrs. D.!"—and now Josiah is breathing thickly, and the half-cut tobacco drops from his inert hands. "Didn't I say I'd always stand your friend?"

Friends! If the window-sill were the impassable gulf across which the suffering Dives cried out to the pitiless Abraham, it could not separate two beings of more different an order. On the one side frenzied eyes, and a heated, feverish face, evil passions unbridled—on the other startled but most innocent eyes, a cool mystified face, entire incomprehensibility of harm.

"Would you rather be an old man's darling or a young man's slave?"—it would be a moral impossibility for Josiah to preface even a prayer with other than a borrowed saying—"for I tell you there's nothink"—losing his head altogether—"no! nothink you shouldn't 'ave that money could buy—if you wanted it; there!"

What madness prevents him from rightly interpreting the gathering terror in Pauline's face? He can scarcely be conscious of what he is doing. He clutches at her sleeve, and whispers with thick articulation, "Only don't keep all your kisses for the selector."

Then, to her crushing shame and distress, does a sudden light for the first time break in upon Pauline's mind. Her rashness of yesterday has been her own or her father's undoing. No friendly inspiration comes to her aid, no ingenious explanation prompts itself, as she pulls away her arm with loathing. But such burning indignation flashes out of the soft eyes that Josiah is stung into throwing out venom.

And thereupon George walks suddenly into the room, imported cows and heifers uppermost in his mind. That something unusual has been said or done George feels convinced at a glance. Young women, engaged in the



peaceful pursuit of stitching velvet on to cloth with bright-coloured silk, are not wont to put on the mask of Melpomene at ten o'clock in the morning—nor can there be any reason why an elderly gentleman, obese, and hitherto reputed sane, should stand pipeless and hatless, with the air of an Orestes, at the same prosaic hour.

So George stalks up to his wife, and looking dangerously at Josiah's purple face, "What's up now?" he asks sharply.

Then Mr. Carp feels that here is an occasion for satisfying his thirst for revenge. Now Pauline will learn that to evince her repugnance so unblushingly a minute ago was folly, to say the least of it.

"I'll tell you what's up," Josiah makes answer, letting drop his words slowly and painfully, "I was asking your wife why she chooses the time you're out for going into selectors' 'uts, and why"——

But he stops suddenly short, rather aghast at the effect of his own words. That face—during his second of speech all contracted and shrunk before him—cannot be George Drafton's good-humoured face! It is working and the lips are twitching, as if words would fain have come from them, yet cannot find an outlet.

It is strange that, during the sudden dead silence following Josiah's revelation, the collie should jump to his feet and growl so uneasily.

Pauline's head was bent upon the sill. She looked up, when the dog growled, straight into her husband's face, and saw the murderous impulse in his eyes. What of human they possessed seemed to have died out—only the brute instinct remained. Then she nerved herself to speak while there was yet time, and the words came, and the strength to bring them out, though the sickness of a great fear was upon her.

"George," she said, "you must hear me first; do as you please then—only listen to me first. I haven't done anything wrong. I could make it all clear to you now, but I dare not explain at this minute. If I did I should repent of it afterwards. Think how we've lived together so far. Don't you know me yet? Isn't it enough if I tell you, on my honour, that I've done nothing you would blame me for? I know I am accountable to you for my actions, but I'm not accountable to Mr. Carp.



I want you to show him you trust me. Before I explain my conduct—and you I promise to explain it to, *you* alone, when we are by ourselves—I want you to take my hand—so—and to say to your uncle that in the face of all he may say, no matter *what* it may be, remember, that you believe in your wife and that you trust her. Will you, George? you will never regret it, dear.”

George's streaked discoloured face was resuming something of its more natural hue. The human expression was returning. He did not speak very distinctly, but when Pauline stood up by his side he unlocked his tightly-clenched fist and twisted his fingers round her cold hand.

“You won't make me believe evil of my wife, Mr. Carp,” he said with prodigious effort, “so you'd better not try!”

Josiah looked like a baffled fiend. Even the collie had run away from him, and was pushing her head between George and Pauline in the front parlour. He picked up his pipe and shuffled off with a defeated chuckle sardonic in tone; but the instant he was gone George dropped into the chair and hid his face.

It terrified Pauline beyond measure to see that sobs were shaking his strong frame.

“George, I'm so sorry!” she cried. “I'm so sorry! You believe in me now, don't you?”

“How can I believe?” he said, his face still hidden, his voice broken. “Believe or not, I'd still have done—just what I did just now. But I'll know the rights of it, or by the Lord, as sure as you're standing there, I'll shoot the fellow before the day's out; yes, and put a bullet through you afterwards!”

She bent over him and pulled his two hands away from his eyes.

“What, George! look me in the face and tell me, sir, now—would you shoot my—*father*!”



## CHAPTER XX.

### JOSIAH'S DEPARTURE.

"Show his eyes and grieve his heart,  
Come like shadows, so depart."

—SHAKSPERE.

THE morning wears on, and Josiah is still tramping about after the fashion of an uneasy spirit, if it were given to a spirit to weigh sixteen stone. He makes of the verandah a sort of Tommy Tiddler's ground, running in and out of it without daring to find breathing time in it. The potato beds represent "home," and as he steers his path among them he can hear the sound of earnest voices coming through the still open window of the front parlour; he can follow the tones, subdued, expostulatory, deprecatory, eager, without distinguishing the words, but there comes at last a sound he can distinguish readily, and which strikes discordantly on his ear. He had never heard Pauline laugh after so light-hearted a fashion at Wattle Villa; like the young Nourmahal of whom Moore tells us that—

"Her laugh, full of life without any control,  
But the sweet one of gracefulness wrung from her soul."

That is the kind of laugh Josiah hears, accompanied by a gruffer guffaw on the part of George. To say that Mr. Carp is unpleasantly surprised would in no wise convey an idea of his condition of mental bewilderment. There is no other solution of the mystery to be arrived at but that his nephew is a fool. Still, as all the world is not married to Pauline, it is open to the remaining portion of it to give due weight to Josiah's testimony. When this abandoned woman finds herself discarded alike from his house and from the house of every respectable member of society in Melbourne, when even here, in the bush, he shall have contrived to affix that to her name which shall close upon her the doors of the hospitable squatters, then no



doubt she will begin to reflect uneasily upon her ill-considered rejection of his friendly offers, and confess, with a confession wrung from her bitterly humbled pride, that the punishment of her crimes is well merited, and that Mr. Carp is not a man to be spurned. For of all ingenious forms of self-deception, that form by means of which Josiah retained his right of sitting in severest judgment upon others, and arrogated to himself only the right of freedom of action, was assuredly the most ingenious. Did his method of reasoning spring from an inherent obliquity of mental vision; from a conscience blunted by crooked dealing; from an impossibility of applying to himself the maxims he would have laid down for others? or did it not rather have its roots in his opinion of human nature at large—an opinion based upon the promptings of his own nature in particular, leading him to the conclusion that restriction was the only cause of virtue, that he was the best judge as to the amount of restriction necessary in his own case, and that for such as threw off their restrictions openly, not warily and in secret, no censure, no vilification, no punishment, could be too great? Always is it a matter of fact that now at this very instant Josiah believed himself full of a righteous wrath, and that had any resident on the Murray plains—King Cocky perhaps alone excepted—been in a position to ride by his side round the boundaries, he would have discoursed to such a resident on morality, respectability, and the like, with a full conviction that he was better qualified to deliver a discourse of the kind than any one else soever.

But, while you are plotting, Josiah, how best you shall bring that bright, sun-loving head to the dust a counter-plot, which shall set yours at nought, is growing into form behind the muslin curtains that you shun. You should remember, Josiah, with your faith in old saws, that it has been said that "Two heads are better than one." The heads are near enough, too, to keep the matter of the plot from your ears. Take another turn through the potato flowers—the plot is not full-grown as yet.

"For I tell you, darling," George is saying, with a face serene as that of a man who has escaped a life-blighting wound, "it won't do to leave your good name to the tender mercies of Master Josiah!"



"Oh, never mind my good name!" cries Pauline gaily; then correcting herself hastily, "I don't mean that quite—I mean, the principal thing of all is to keep my father's secret."

George seems doubtful.

"It beats me, Pauline, why you never told me about it before. You might have known that the old man could have put up here. I'd have kept his counsel fast enough; I'm pretty fly, you know. I'd never have let on to a soul that I had a father-in-law in Victoria; and as to that, if he'd been hard up or anything, I'd have shared my last crust with him—you know I would!"

"Yes; but George, in the first place, he would not even hear of my telling you. If things had not reached such a climax just now—if I had seen any other way of preventing you from rushing round with a gun and massacring everybody on the station, do you think I would have told you as it is? And in the second place, I'm quite sure papa's sensitive on my account too, and that he couldn't bear my husband to know his wife's father—please don't lose the thread of the relationship, it sounds rather like that riddle—was hiding away from justice. How was I to suppose you knew even *that* about him already?"

"All the same, my old woman, it wasn't treating me fairly. You didn't give me a chance; you've made me show in very bad colours sometimes, and I've had a weight on my mind other times. I felt as if I could make away with myself just now; it's what I'd have done, too, after I'd had my revenge."

"You always harp upon that one theme of revenge, George! It's just the feeling I can't understand. If anybody deceived me, or didn't love me properly—*Merci!* I should say—such a person might go the instant I found it out; but I can't see what's to be gained by hurting people bodily, in the least."

"Stop 'em from deceiving anybody else. Besides, I'm not going to argue about it; I know what I'd do myself, and there's an end of the matter."

"Yes," says Pauline, with a short sigh, "you've often told me that. But now—about my father—what had we better do? You say Mr. Carp will malign me."

"Malign you?—the old brute!—I should think he would! I expect he saw you kiss *Mr. John Smith!* I



feel as if I must go and shake him by the neck for daring to *think* a syllable of harm of you!"

"Don't be so pugilistic, George; and tell me, would it matter very much if you were to break all connection with Mr. Carp from to-day?"

"Matter so much, my darling, that it would ruin me outright. I'm under no obligations to him—do you see?—but every penny I've got's invested in this place, and if I were to sell out now I should be paupered. It's not so easy to pick up a billet. Don't talk of it, my dear. It would cook my chances with the colt. What are you looking so serious about—eh?"

"Nothing!" Pauline replies, stooping down to caress the collie's head. She knows that to hint at Mr. Carp's offers of "friendship" to her husband would be to bring upon him the ruin that he dreads. Again the tangled knot in the web of life she is spinning from day to day defames its smoothness. What trickery of fate has allotted to her latterly this constant necessity for keeping something in the background? From the day of her pledging herself to George the life of the old days past seems to have become an impossible dream of innocence and ease. She began by deceiving herself wilfully, and with her eyes open. Now perforce she must deceive those about her.

"Only I don't see my way out of it."

She says it half aloud, in answer to her own thoughts.

"You may trust me, my darling," cries George, believing that the original dilemma is weighing upon her mind. "I've got it all settled in my head what I mean to do. First, I'll get the saddles put on a couple of horses—one for me, one for my uncle. I'll make him keep his tongue between his teeth, if he wants to keep a whole skin, until I get him to the selector's. Then I'll leave him outside, do you see, and I'll go in and lay the whole case before your father. I know what I'd do in his place, and I feel pretty well sure of what he'll do in his. I tell you the chances are ten to one that my uncle knows anything at all about your father's fiasco. If he knows that you were a Miss Vyner, that's about all he does know. What's that got to do with a lieutenant of the same name who slopes to South America, eh? He'll take it into his head that the old man was



hard up, and didn't like to be seen sponging on me, and that you were helping him on the quiet—going with tucker and things when I was out of the way; there'd be nothing extraordinary in that. Well, what have you got to say to it? If you can think of anything better to be done, say so, for there's no time to be lost."

"I can't think of anything, indeed; only you must make me a promise—a solemn promise, mind! not a conditional one—before you go."

"Anything you like—but be quick about it," replies George, putting his head out of the window to see that Josiah shall not escape him.

"You must promise to see my father quite alone; try to adopt a different style in talking to him from the one you use when you are speaking about him. Please be wonderfully considerate. Tell him how helpless I was. Say that even now I am quite ready, and you too—that we are both ready to keep his secret. Yes, George, you *must* promise me this. Unless I thought you would leave it entirely in his own hands to enlighten Mr. Carp or not as he thinks fit, I would run to him now on foot! Don't be so long in making your promise! Haven't I trusted you wholly? It is no exaggeration to say that I would rather have braved all the consequences of your rage just now than have told you my father's secret if I had thought you capable of betraying him."

George still hesitates.

"You don't know what you want! Nobody's going to lug your father off to prison, if that's what you're afraid of. I tell you, my uncle would have no scruples about what he might say if he isn't told all."

"Good heavens, George! is your uncle the whole world? You pretend not to be afraid of him, and I think sometimes he is your living embodiment of Mrs. Grundy. Isn't it enough that you trust me? If you tell him you are perfectly satisfied, how dare he even question what I do? I will answer for it, that if you say there are good reasons for not explaining all about Mr. John Smith just now, he will think nothing more of it, and end by forgetting all about it very soon."

"You let him alone for 'forgetting all about' anything he can make mischief out of," replies George saturninely. "However, I know well enough what your father'll say."



"Still, you'll promise, George—won't you?" she says beseechingly.

When Pauline adopts a certain tone of persuasion, George soon relents.

"I'm bound to promise, my darling, because I can't say 'No.' And now, will you make me a promise too?"

Looking out into the garden as he says these words, he sees Josiah creeping along the fence towards the house, and shuts the window with a bang. Then, seating himself on the broad window-ledge inside, he puts an arm round his wife and draws her close to his heart.

"You think me a rough sort of a chap very often, I know, my old woman. You don't know how full my heart is of you. You could do anything you liked with me! Why don't you try sometimes? You know I'd give up anything or go in for anything to please you! Only don't let secrets come in between us two. You make me a promise now you won't keep anything from me any more. There isn't a thought in my heart I wouldn't lay bare to you, I tell you! Why won't you act the same by me?"

"Because I *can't*; the circumstances are different," she replies hesitatingly. "But don't be angry with me! I won't keep any secrets from you. The rest may come in time. You are very good to me! I warned you—don't you remember, one night?—that you were risking a great deal by being so determined to marry me."

"You always manage to give me a chill," says George sadly. "Do you think I didn't know when I was courting you it was a one-sided affair? But I couldn't help it: if it were to do again, it would be just the same, I know."

"Then nothing remains to be said," she answers. "I think, too, that when a thing is irretrievable, it is wise to make up one's mind that one would do it over again if we had the chance. It is almost as comforting as fatalism. Don't let us talk about our feelings, though, while your uncle is prowling about."

"By Jove! no. There's no time to be lost either!" he says, pulling out his watch. "Good-bye, my darling; I'll make things straight, take my word for it."

As George hurries out of the room the sun comes suddenly to the front. He scatters the misty covering which enshrouds him with some beams of true Australian



intensity. He blazes forth in a white heat, illuminating the open pages of Pauline's book and setting mote-like shadows careering across them. Pauline's mind has now no more fixity than those dancing motes that whirl from verse to verse out into the sunshine. Instead of soaring with the soul of Adonias to the genius-lit star whither it would have accompanied him, it is travelling across the Murray plains with George and Mr. Carp. It is exhausting itself in speculations on the result of the disclosure of the secret—it is wondering at the half glimpse it has obtained into the darker abysses of human feeling. Pauline was by no means a heroine of the "Unhand me, villain!" type. Only a young girl, as yet, to whom a whole lifetime of unsettling experiences seems to have presented itself during the few months of her matronhood. Instead of feeling, bride-like, after her marriage, that a fuller life has begun for her, a life in which she can rest satisfied because of the incentives that hope and love and confidence set daily before her, she has had, as it were, a sensation of being stranded at the outset of her career. She admits that she had no right to expect it to be otherwise, and yet she rebels against her self-allotted portion. In these rebellious moments she is bitter to George as well as to herself. As he had just told her, he would have risked everything to make her his own. Yes! risked the sacrifice of her happiness, the possibility of long years of remorse for himself. Then comes another phase. The thing is done! No force after all has been used: George at least must have known his own mind, however uncertain and wavering she herself may have been. His love seems now so deeply-rooted a part of his nature, that without it Pauline cannot picture him to herself at all. How thousand times better it would be, she tells herself, to turn such a love to account. But how turn it to account? Shall she try to alter the bent of his tastes? That cannot be. Besides, what has she to offer him in exchange? Herself a dreamer, prone to indulge in speculative theories from instinct and association, she would be opposed by a sort of dead wall if she sought to awaken George's mind to a sense of interest in her ideas. Have not the first approaches to them been tabooed in the days of her courtship? Moreover, would he be the



happier were such an awakening possible? She abandons so fruitless a train of thought, and wishes that the afternoon would come quickly. Was ever so interminable a day? Can nothing be done to coax it into action?

The dinner-hour passes by, and the afternoon lags on, until the shadows of the fig-trees are sprawling all across the path. Still no news! Half a hundred times Pauline runs to the back door at the sound of Pepper's faintest bark. She has tried to decoy the dragging hours into speeding through the minutes less reluctantly; she has ushered the whole troop of dogs out through the garden-gate towards the river for a walk—she has carried enough gardening tools into the front path to reconstruct all the potato beds at Rubria—she has made a contract with herself not to look at the clock until she has rattled mechanically through all the loose pieces of music lying on the top of the piano. Nothing avails to make it later than four when by all the laws of sensation it ought to be seven. And advancing time brings no relief, only a greater intensity of expectation. Now the shadows in the path have melted away into the universal shade thrown by the "Spirit of Night's mantle grey, star inwrought."

Pauline sees ghastly visions of her father, of evil-eyed Josiah, and hot-tempered George, at daggers drawn on the dreary plains. She is almost fain to take the lantern, and roam like an uneasy Will-o'-the-wisp by the dark river-side, when the sound of Veno's bark strikes upon her ear with a tone of blessed promise in its rough contentment. Down the narrow passage for the hundred and fiftieth time she runs, and sees, through the uncertain starlight, two horses trotting by each other into the yard. Her husband is on one—the other, she remembers, was bestridden by Mr. Carp in the morning; it is riderless now, and George is leading it by the bridle. Pauline is standing by his stirrup in a very flash of time.

For perhaps the first time since she has come to Rubria, she does not assail her husband with the usual formula, "Well, George! have you brought me a letter?" the "Well, George!" being the most compressed form of welcome, prior to coming to the point, that she has been able to evolve. To-night the interest in her letters pales before the greater interest in her father.



She looks up, too apprehensive to speak, almost dreading the tidings that have been so tardy in reaching her.

"So there you are, old woman!" says George, tilting his leg across the saddle, and assuming a tone of leisurely unconcern. "And Veno, too! was a good old dog, he was! Come on, Veno!"

"Oh, George! you know how anxious I am."

"Well, give a fellow breathing-time, at any rate. Here, Alexander McClosky, the Great Alexander—Alexander the Great—take the horses up to the stable; give 'em some water the first thing, and turn out the filly—do you hear?"

"Now, at last, George!"

There are symptoms in her tone of a pent-up impatience that threatens to give way. Nevertheless George stalks on in front of her to the house. Supper is laid out in the little back room. The ill-poised lamp is alight on the table, reflecting itself moon-like in the bulgy flanks of the station teapot.

Pauline is too eager to be dignified.

"You are heartless, George!" she expostulates, running in after him and almost crying with vexation. "It is such poor wit to keep me in suspense any longer."

"If you only knew what a nice colour you get when you're excited, old woman," remarks George, sitting down in the arm-chair, and proceeding to pull off his boots. "Just run and look at yourself in the glass; it's something lovely—'pon my word it is."

"George!" despondently, and with lips that are beginning to tremble outright, "I believe now that you either haven't seen my father, or that you've betrayed him. Is it such a pleasure to you to see me so anxious?"

"No! I like to get you a bit excited, though. It's not often you honour me with such a lot of attention. There—now—don't you fluff! Everything's as right as the bank, I tell you."

"Yes, but how? I won't be satisfied until you've told me everything, just as it happened from the beginning."

She draws a chair from the table, and places herself exactly opposite him, that from his expression as well as from his words she may draw her own conclusions about the day's events.

"First of all—was my father still at the hut? You know it was nearly empty when I went there yesterday."

"No; he cleared out early this morning. I saw him



right enough, but not at the hut. This was how it was. We jogged on, you see, after we'd started this morning. The old man was as mum as you please. He'd put in a word every now and again about the stock, but he took jolly good care not to breathe *your* name again. I didn't say 'yea' or 'nay' till we'd got to the selector's hut. Empty as an egg-shell, my dear! Cleaned out! At the township, thinks I, for a pound. I don't know what Mr. Carp was thinking of, I'm sure. If we'd been on a desert island, I'd have been into him for a certainty! I'd have lambed him down, I tell you!—I can't stand that fellow's way of looking sometimes. But Lord! he's no more heart than a chicken. You should have seen him ten minutes afterwards, when we were riding by that belt of scrub near the river! The filly put her foot on to a long twisted stick, and it jumped up. It gave *me* a sort of a start, I tell you, but Mr. Carp turned as white as that tablecloth. 'I thought it was a snake, George!' he said. Pon my word, I thought he'd have dropped from his horse. I felt disgusted with the fellow!"

"All that doesn't bring me nearer to my father," puts in Pauline disconsolately.

"That's all coming in good time," replies George, waving one hand with a sententious air. "We passed the homestead on our way back. I'd half a mind to come in and tell you not to wait dinner for us. Then I thought I'd never get Master Josiah on if we once turned in. Well, it was getting on in the day when we reached the township. There was the coach waiting at Sullivan's all ready for a start, and who should I see climbing on top of it, with a swag as big as a house, but Pulver."

"Oh, then, of course, my father was there! Please, please go on quickly, George!"

"Don't interrupt me. I can't stand being interrupted when I'm in the middle of a story. Now you've put me all out. Where was I?"

"You were at the hotel—don't you remember? You may tease me with interest at any other time, if you'll spare me now."

"Oh, ah! so I was. Well, I went straight into the bar—left my uncle outside with the horses, too. I wasn't going to put myself out for him. 'I want to see Mr. John Smith,' I said to Sullivan. The fellow stared.



I think he fancied I was on a lay of some sort. Just at that minute your father came out with a greatcoat. He gave a start, I could see, when he saw who I was. 'Hold hard, sir,' I said—I was jolly respectful, I tell you—'I want to have a word with you before you're off.'"

"Then he will have guessed," murmurs Pauline; "poor father! he will have seen that I could not keep his secret for him."

"Well, the long and the short of it is," continues George, "that we went into the inn-parlour, and I shut the door. At first I thought there'd be a devil of a go, but I kept in mind what you asked me this morning. I told him straight you'd been seen yesterday afternoon sneaking out of his place, and what a 'to-do' there'd been—but, take my word for it, I never let on that I knew why he was skulking away here under another name. I did say, though, that it was rough on me to keep me in the dark, because anything belonging to you belonged to me; and if he'd come out with a notion of trying squatting, why, the house and everything I had would have been at his disposal while he was getting his hand in—in fact, as long as he lived, for the matter of that. And do you know, all the time I was yarning I was thinking to myself what a fool I must have been not to guess he was your governor from the first. Why, you're as like as two peas; not about the eyes, but about the skin, and the way your hair grows on the forehead and the bridge of your nose. I never saw anything like it before."

"And how did it all end? Don't leave anything out. How did he look? Do you think he minded terribly being discovered? Did you make him understand there was no help for it?"

"He looked rather foolish at first, but after a bit he talked awfully nicely—he made *me* feel rather soft, I tell you. He seemed to say it was more on *your* account, lest I should ever throw anything at you, that he made such a point of keeping his name a secret. I think, somehow, he'll be more comfortable about you now! He seemed to like the way I spoke about you, I tell you."

"That pleases me very much," cries Pauline. "I think you must have said all I would have liked you to say, though I daresay you said it in your own way. But what about Mr. Carp?"



"I'm coming to that all in good time. Of course I let your father down gently. I told him of what a scandal racket there'd be if old Carpy had the handling of your name. He wouldn't even wait till I'd done. He pushed straight out through the bar, and came almost on top of Mr. Carp. He didn't speak loud, you know, but he looked him full in the face, and then he turned to me and he says, 'Mr. Drafton, is this the gentleman'—you should have heard him say *gentleman*, it was pretty rough on my uncle, mind you—'is this the gentleman who has been good enough to take my *daughter* under his surveillance?' That was quite enough for Josiah! I never saw a man look so small in my life. He wouldn't come back—and you may take my tip for it, I didn't press him to, either. He says you're to send his traps after him to the township, for he's going to put up at the hotel to-night. I think he said something or other about sending his respects to you, as I was riding off—but I was pretty cool to him, you may depend upon it."

"And what became of my father?"

"Didn't I tell you? He went on in the coach with Pulver. I expect he'll write to you, now that it's all square; and I say, old woman, I've been thinking of a lot of things as I was riding back to-night."

"Yes?" says Pauline, with a questioning smile. "Such as?"——

"Well! such as what a mistake it is for there to be any confounded mysteries between husband and wife. Women like that sort of thing, I think. I like everything to be above-board. I"——

"Oh, so do I!" interrupts Pauline, "but I like to be *trusted* despite appearances!"

"And I say, I don't like there to be so much as appearances even," says George. "I'm like that cove—what was he called again—Cæsar, wasn't it?—who said"——

"Yes, yes, I know!" she cuts him short; "but if Cæsar hadn't been as great a humbug as Henry VIII. in that way, he wouldn't have dared to advance such a pretext for getting rid of his wife!"

"Oh, if you're going to talk me down," says George, "I cave in. Tell Mrs. McClosky to hurry up with the tea, and we'll go and have a look at the colt!"



## CHAPTER XXI.

### PAULINE'S INTRODUCTION TO THE MELBOURNE CUP.

"Quoth she, 'I've heard old cunning stagers  
Say, fools for arguments use wagers.'"

—BUTLER, *Hudibras*.

ANOTHER Melbourne Cup day has come round. George, in irreproachable *tenue*, with his racing-glass slung round his well-fitting horsey coat and light waistcoat, is conducting Pauline to a bench upon the lawn just below the stand, whence she can see everything that he considers best worth seeing upon this greatest of all great days in the year. He is loth to leave her sitting there alone, a prey to the boldly admiring eyes of passing bookmakers, though, by a strange contradiction, he likes to take her to the saddling-paddock, and, feigning to be unconscious of the sensation she creates, show her off before an appreciative audience. But then he must be by her side in his own person, properly to enjoy the tribute of staring approval that follows her progress.

Pauline herself is bent upon enjoyment. The familiar has been talked down, and forbidden to show his face for the whole day. She has a presentiment, too, that she is going to be happy. The weather is delicious. And only to behold the gay crowd and green lawn, after such a long experience of dead vegetation, with spectres of trees and charred stumps standing in the midst of the Rubria wastes, is to feel that existence is enjoyable. George's worship, perhaps, does not count for very much, but the enthusiasm that her new frock has aroused in him confirms the sense of elation she has not been able to repress since she beheld herself in it—full length—that morning in the cheval glass in their room at Scott's Hotel. In spite of familiars, Josiah Carp, hasty marriages, and droughts, it is still something to be young and strong, to wear a new and



very pretty toilette, and to see the fact of one's becoming it reflected not only in a sympathetic cheval glass, but in the eyes of all the people one meets.

"There's the Governor's party coming along," says George, as he stands up and raises his hat to a group of bowing heads. "Do you see that chap walking by Lady M——? He's here with his yacht; you just look at him, Pauline. He's a regular tip-topper, ain't he? By the Lord, I think he's bowing to *us*. He must have mistaken you for somebody else. Though" (in a confidential whisper) "there isn't a woman here a patch upon you, my old girl—that's *my* humble opinion!"

"Oh, don't, George, please! See, he's coming to speak to us. I think I met him once in Sydney at a dance—I suppose he remembers me."

Before Pauline can say more, Sir Francis Segrave is raising his hat again and holding out his hand as he comes forward towards the husband and wife. The hawk-like nose and long drooping moustaches, the close-cut grizzled hair and broad shoulders—the indescribable poise of the head, as of a man who carries himself masterfully—the whole *ensemble*, in short, that to a young girl's imagination speak of something refined and heroic, and that to a maturer judgment would betray the experienced man of the world, of strong and possibly unscrupulous passions—how should Pauline not have remembered these? She is angry with herself as she feels the colour rising and spreading itself over brow and cheek. What a country-bred, colonial-bred person she must appear! Sir Francis will go away with such an impression of her.

But in spite of the inopportune blush his sudden appearance has called forth, Sir Francis does not seem by any means in a hurry to go away. He has almost been obliged to undertake his own introduction to Mr. Drafton, whom he does not even know to be Pauline's husband at first. And he puts George at ease immediately by his unlimited praise of the stand, and the course, and the arrangements generally. These are subjects that, next to his wife and Victory, lie closest to George's heart. He makes up his mind that his new acquaintance is the right sort. Before he has been five minutes in his company he has told him all about



his colt, and how he stands to win a pot of money upon him, but if he loses—"Coopered, by Jove!" with a portentous shake of the head.

Though Sir Francis does not understand Australian slang, least of all George's particular form of it, he gathers from the latter's expression of face that consequences too fatal for utterance would follow Victory's defeat.

"I'll take you to see the little horse before the race, if you like," says George confidentially. "You can give me your unbiassed opinion about him."

There are very few words exchanged on the present occasion between Pauline and her newly-found friend. But as Sir Francis moves away, he asks her in George's presence if she will take compassion upon an unprotected stranger, and walk with him on the lawn after the next race. Possibly he has looked at other women with exactly the same look as the one he directs at her while he makes his request. Such looks are as natural (or come as naturally after long habit) to certain kinds of men, as the look wherewith a narrow-eyed Australian snake will fascinate an inexperienced little ground-lark. But to Pauline it is quite a new experience.

"Well, old woman, I shall leave you in good company anyhow," says George half an hour later, as he perceives Sir Francis coming up to claim the promised walk. "And mind you, if you make any bets of gloves, don't you do it without consulting *me*. I'll give you the tip. Look! I've marked the favourites for you in the first race."

He is off to the saddling-paddock before Pauline has time to answer. A few moments afterwards he is pointing out his wife walking by the side of "that fellow with the yacht, you know," to one or two admiring bookmakers. It is with the joyous conviction that his old woman is having a good time of it that he goes about the serious business of the day. For all his belief in Victory, it is just as well to have something upon all the other races. George is soon so engrossed in the profound pursuit of backing his opinion upon this race, and hedging upon the other, that he almost forgets he has a wife to look after at all.

And Pauline? It was a true presentiment then which had told Pauline a while ago that her day at the Cup was



going to turn out a very happy one. It is the custom in our cause-and-effect age to explain many psychological and physiological phenomena (for, of a verity, the two are inextricably connected) by the mysterious influences of magnetism. Spiritualists, on the other hand, will account for affinities by supposing the existence of an ethereal matter called aura which surrounds human beings, and attracts or repels the aura of other human beings.

However this may be, it is a fact that, under certain conditions, mutual likings will start into life and develop with a celerity truly marvellous. The progress of an *entrainement* (to use an untranslatable French word) is often swift and imperceptible as that of the rising tide, so that it is only after the enjoyers, or rather the victims thereof, are submerged by it, and swept away by it, that they become aware of its force. The insidious power does not make itself felt at the outset.

Pauline, we may be sure, does not inquire whence the new stimulus may come that throws such a radiance over her day. But she expands, like a flower brought out into the sunlight, under its influence. It is such a new delight—this of being talked to by a man who seems to understand *everything* as Sir Francis Segrave does. Sometimes it is only by that curious, half-amused expression in his eyes—an expression she watches for and likes—that she feels how entirely he understands. It is not that she has wanted for companionship in the course of her short life. Chubby, her pupil, her pet, and her plaything, has been the companion of her gay and her sad hours. Madame Delaunay has entered into her questioning moods, and George—poor George—has been her adoring husband for what seems sometimes to have been a dreadfully long time. Still the experience of being able to speak, and laugh, and think with anybody so manifestly clever and great and wise as Sir Francis Segrave—the feeling of seeing things from the same point of view, and having all one's surroundings suddenly brought into harmony—all this is entirely new and delightful. It is Pauline's innocence that allows her to yield herself up unthinkingly to the happiness of the hour—that renders it possible for her to sun herself in the dangerous delight of this novel and sudden sympathy.

To pave the way to a good understanding, the inevitable commonplaces have to be exchanged at the outset.



Sir Francis goes to work, with the caution habitual to him, to feel his ground with his newly-recovered acquaintance. He is not a man to forget any kind of feminine attraction that has once come under his notice, however fleeting the impression may have been, and he had immediately connected his recollection of a young girl with remarkable eyes (with whom he had once danced on board a man-of-war in Sydney harbour) with the vision of the beautiful young woman seated upon the bench. But he is puzzled to account for the transformation.

Was Miss Vyner married offhand by her relatives to some young Cræsus of a squatter? Or was this Mr. Drafton really her *fancy* man? The problem is worth going into, all the more that there is a charming face connected with it, and Sir Francis goes into it accordingly.

But he sets to work very dexterously and gently. Pauline is led along the current without any idea whither it is tending. At first they talk of nothing but the recent voyage of the yacht in the South Seas. They forget that preparations for a race are going on, and continue to walk slowly up and down upon the least frequented part of the lawn. The grass is like a carpet of plush, and Pauline's train of muslin and lace trails, snake-like, round her feet, as she turns to begin her walk afresh each time. Her companion is obliged to bend his head a little now and then to catch her words. George is away in the saddling-paddock. For him, at the present moment, Victory is the point round which the whole universe revolves, and Sir Francis continues to describe the South Seas to George's wife.

"I wish I could see it all," says Pauline, as though thinking aloud, with the accompaniment of a half unconscious sigh. Like Desdemona, her imagination is taken captive by the

"antres vast, and deserts idle,  
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven."

"I have never seen anything but Sydney, and Melbourne, and Rubria."

"Rubria?" echoes Sir Francis interrogatively. There is a peculiar quality in his voice that Pauline finds singularly attractive. In some people such a voice would sound almost domineering, but in him it has a curious



charm. There is a subtle strength and substance in it that speak of the habit of command. But sometimes there is a latent caress in it too, sometimes an amusingly ironical inflexion. It is the most cultivated voice, Pauline thinks, she ever heard. George is very fond of Pauline's own voice, but then he is fond of everything about her. Compared with the refined English voices Sir Francis must be in the habit of hearing, she has secret misgivings about the manner in which hers must strike upon his ears.

But her misgivings would soon vanish if she could divine what is passing in her companion's mind. The slight precision with which Mrs. Drafton speaks, an unconscious following of the careful intonation of her French grandmother's conversation, give a kind of piquancy to her manner of speaking that Sir Francis finds as captivating as all the rest.

"Rubria?" he repeats inquiringly. "Is that another of your mushroom capitals?"

Pauline laughs, because the epithet is accompanied by a look which might be directed towards a child one was trying to tease. She is not susceptible, after the manner of Australians, to slights cast upon her native place.

"I'm sorry you don't know more of Australian geography," she says demurely. "Rubria isn't a town at all. It's our station. But perhaps you don't know what a station is."

Sir Francis loves to get as good as he gives, especially when he is talking to a woman. The matter-of-factness of women in general is one of the reasons why he often prefers looking at them to talking to them.

"I *do* know what a station is, as it happens," he rejoins, with an air of feigned triumph that makes Pauline laugh once more (she is in a mood in which laughter comes easily); "and I don't mean a railway station, though I daresay you think I do. I suppose Rubria is as big as Wales. Is it marked upon the map?"

"Marked upon the map!" Pauline is laughing again. "Why, Rubria's only a little bit of a station."

But "little bit" as it may be, Sir Francis is profoundly interested in it. Pauline is not in the least aware that in describing her surroundings she is laying bare to her companion a great portion of her inner life as well. She has not the least conception of the rapidity with which a man so profoundly versed in the ways of women can



perform the mental process vulgarly known as that of putting two and two together. Unconsciously she has betrayed far more than she has any idea or intention of betraying.

From an objective point of view Rubria is dreary enough, with its dead and dying sheep and burned soil, under her word-painting of it. How is she to guess that, from a subjective point of view, it already unfolds itself to her companion as a garden of Eden, in which she herself is Eve before the fall? I cannot say whether he carries the comparison so far as to put himself into the smooth skin of the serpent winding round the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But the thought *does* flash across his mind that, after he has backed Mr. Drafton's colt, and shown himself heart and soul interested in Victory's pedigree and training, and after he has taken Mr. Drafton down the bay in his yacht, he may be invited to put through a few weeks in this far-away earthly paradise.

The thought is answerable for the new turn which the conversation takes. Always "feeling his way," Sir Francis divines that the safest method of approaching Mrs. Drafton is through the intellectual part of her nature. He knows all the winds and turns to a woman's heart, and can change his tactics, if he finds himself on the wrong tack, with the skill of a very veteran.

Having held forth upon the beauty of some of the half-caste Maori women he has seen, just sufficiently to show what an intense artistic appreciation he possesses of beauty of form, and in a way that proves how the absence of mind and soul renders this beauty powerless to hold and to fix its worshippers, he glides off into the topics prompted apparently by a chance remark of Pauline's to the effect that it was difficult to get books, especially new books, at Rubria.

Here there is infinite ground for discussion. It would seem as though Sir Francis must know all Pauline's favourite books from end to end by heart. And there comes a kind of bright interested light into her eyes, and the rare colour mounts in her pure cheeks, as the very thoughts and questionings that have grown out of her reading, and that nobody has cared about or understood of late, are put into words for her by her companion, with comments such as she loves, full of



suggestions for her intelligent pondering of them. Who ever speaks of modern literature, with any kind of earnestness, without drifting into metaphysics? Pauline does not see Sir Francis's expression as he approaches this quicksand. She is looking in front of her, as she is wont to do when she is perplexed by the sudden intrusion of the crushing notion of infinity into her poor little mortal brain. Her eyes are fixed upon space, and she does not feel the ardent glance that fastens itself at this moment upon her face. Perhaps if she did she would think more of present dangers than of incomprehensible mysteries. Though it may be that she would not have divined what that rapid glance signifies. Possibly Sir Francis does not analyse the impression in himself which gives rise to it. If he were to probe his sensations perhaps they would resume themselves in the feeling that this Mrs. Drafton is one of the most charming women he ever met, and, despite her remarkable intelligence, a complete *ingénue*.

She is evidently unaware of her own power. And to fancy such a creature, with all her wealth of fresh young beauty and latent passion, condemned to a prosaic half-existence, for Sir Francis is convinced now that Pauline's life is of that unsatisfying description. Supposing it should fall to him to wake the sleeping princess in her gloomy enchanted bower? And supposing, among the dragons that guard the door thereof, the dragon of religious faith and orthodoxy should be found wanting? Vaguely these thoughts may account for the peculiar transient glance that flashes unperceived by Pauline from her companion's eyes.

When she does look up, the usual courteous, imperturbable, man-of-the-world expression is all that she can read in them, for George is now approaching in a wild flurry of excitement.

"Good gracious, Pauline!—don't you know they're bringing the horses up for the Cup? If you don't both come along in double-quick time, you won't see Victory led out."



## CHAPTER XXII.

### VICTORY MAKES HIS NAME GOOD.

“They laugh that win.”—SHAKSPERE.

As the “Melbourne Cup” forms every succeeding year the theme of impassioned writing in “dailies” and “weeklies” innumerable throughout the whole of Australia, I shall abstain from entering into a minute description of the race in which Mr. Drafton’s colt took part in the year 187—. To prove, however, the universality of the interest which this great event arouses, not only in Victoria, but wherever the name of Victoria is known, I will relate a true anecdote of what happened in the month of November many years ago.

The scene was the Bois de la Cambre, near Brussels, under a leaden sky. The actors, two lads of some twelve or thirteen years, who, meeting at a cricket-match got up among the English schoolboys of the place, looked at each other doubtfully for an instant without speaking, after the manner of English boys in general. At length—

“You’re English?” says the elder.

“Ye-es,” says the younger. Then, after a short pause, “I come from Australia.”

“From Australia?” echoes the elder; “so do I.”

The younger regards him for an instant with uncertainty. Perhaps his new acquaintance is taking a rise out of him. Then deliberately—

“Well, if you come from Australia, *Who won the Cup?*”

The winner was immediately and unhesitatingly named, and the fellow-Australians fraternised on the spot. The “Cup,” I may add, had only been run the day before, but the telegraph (recently established between England and the colonies) had apprised the anxious Australians in the mother-country of the result of the race as soon as it was known.



If, twelve thousand miles from the scene of action, the Cup has the power to set patriotic Australian hearts beating, my readers may judge of its effect upon the favoured individuals who behold the great race with their bodily eyes. Pauline is almost awed by the effect of it upon the vast multitude around. There is a dead silence as the horses sweep round the course for the first time and the gay colours of the line of jockeys begin to separate and fall apart. It is only as they stride past the judge's box on their second round that a confused murmur, gradually rising to a great and wild clamour, fills the air. Pauline is standing on a bench next to George, whose panting breath sounds close to her ear. Sir Francis's tall figure, standing on the ground on the other side of her, serves as a protection and support. He is watching the race with attentive interest, and Pauline can hear him murmur, "Victory, by Jove! Victory has it!" in tones of surprised approval, as the horses go circling round the second time. Pauline, it may be observed, has not entertained the most distant expectation that Victory would make good his name, but as she hears her neighbour's *sotto voce* observation, she turns her eyes for an instant towards George. The sight of his face almost causes her to cry out in alarm. It is working like the face of a corpse pulled into action by galvanism. The hue is corpse-like in its sickly pallor. His eyes seem to be starting out of his head, and his fingers tremble as he essays to adjust the glass through which he is watching Victory's progress.

"George!" whispers Pauline, with her lips beginning to tremble; "George, don't look like that. I'm *frightened*."

"Don't speak, for the Lord's sake!" rejoins her husband in a choking voice. "Don't speak—I can't stand it. Don't you see Victory's going to win. Victory's got it, I tell you, Victory—by God—Victory!"

He is already shouting like a maniac, while the cry is taken up by thousands and hundreds of thousands of voices. A few despairing cries of the names of rival horses that are close to Victory's heels—cries angry and vehement, mingle with the rest, but they are soon shouted down. *Victory*, and *Victory* rends the air. Pauline is sobbing. She cannot in the least tell why. Somebody seems to have tilted George's hat up in



the air. He is ramming it down anyhow, and a minute later Pauline sees him running, like one bereft of his senses, in the wake of a crowd of betting men towards the saddling-paddock to hail Victory's return.

Then her new friend turns towards her with the peculiar half smile in his eyes that Pauline has learnt already to connect with him alone. She is still a little hysterical, and is feeling rather ashamed of it, but there is something in Sir Francis's treatment of her that is very reassuring and consoling. Although she has been adored by George, she has not known the meaning of having him *aux petits soins* for her. In this branch of chivalry Sir Francis is an adept. He knows exactly the point at which a woman whose nerves have been upset may be treated like a child, and soothed and comforted. Pauline could not tell just what he says as she wipes her eyes. She only knows that he is very, *very* kind—kinder than anybody she has ever known, and that it is very pleasant to sit there by his side, feeling quite at her ease; not needing to speak unless she is inclined; not embarrassed by the consciousness that her eyelashes are still wet; and only sure that some great, warm, sheltering influence is close at hand. What would she have done all alone in the unheeding crowd—the first experience of a crowd she has ever had—if *he* had not been there—when George rushed off and left her, shaken and bewildered by her emotions?

Poor unconscious Pauline! It is not at this stage that it would be possible to explain to her, with any hope of her comprehending the explanation, that perhaps the fate of being left alone would have been really the better of the two. No doubt, after George had gone, her familiar would have come and sate beside her, and perhaps caused her to shed a few extra tears. But how is she to know that even the familiar might have been safer—if not better—company than Sir Francis, with his tender, chivalrous, careful protection of her?

There are lessons that are only learned in the living school of experience, in which Pauline had not as yet studied her A B C.

When George returns, which he only does after the numbers are up, his excitement has somewhat calmed down. Joy, like grief, is exhausting, and the delirious triumph with which he witnessed Victory's success has, as he would have said himself, "taken it out of him."



Sir Francis is obliged to hurry off to join the aide-de-camp who has come to bid him to lunch with the rest of the Governor's party, but he cordially accepts George's invitation to come and drink a glass of champagne in Victory's honour at a later hour in the afternoon.

Pauline is carried off, in her turn, by her lord and master, to the carriage in which the young couple have been invited to lunch by some wealthy friends of Mr. Carp. She is still in the condition known as that of "feeling dreamy," and answers somewhat mechanically the congratulations that overwhelm her upon her husband's success. George is sufficiently restored to himself to taste the full sweetness of being, at one and the same time, the possessor of Pauline as a wife and Victory as a colt. He introduces his old woman to all his friends, and his eyes sparkle with satisfaction at the effect she produces. To Pauline herself the whole affair is like a play, in which she is called upon to act an impromptu *rôle*. She acquits herself of it with full credit in the eyes of the public, smiling in the right place, making now and then an amusing repartee in her pretty *un-English* English, and raising George's elation to unimagined heights. But, somehow, nothing seems quite real. The people are puppets, the society chatter is got up as a joke. The sandwiches and champagne taste astonishingly genuine, it is true, but they are make-believes, like all the rest. By-and-by she will wake up at Rubria on a hot-wind morning, and it will all have vanished—fashionable crowd, and gay lawn, and wild excitement. Nothing of it will remain—nothing, unless—— But why should *that* remain more than the rest?

It will remain, however; and it will remain because a stronger will than Pauline's intends that it shall remain. A couple of hours later she is again walking by Sir Francis's side, but George is of the party this time. He has been called upon to celebrate Victory's triumph so often since two o'clock, that he leads the way almost mechanically, though with uncertain steps, to the carriage-paddock, where champagne naturally runs like water upon Cup day. From being unnaturally flushed, he has turned very pale, and his eyes have a singular fixity of expression that Pauline has never noticed in them before. He hardly speaks at all. When he *does* hazard a few words, the enunciation of them seems to cost him a great effort,



and even then they are not always entirely consequent or coherent. Pauline has never known any one to look or speak like George before. She has seen people tipsy in the streets, and in her childish days she has been wont, with the merciless ignorance of childhood, to class murderers, robbers, tipsy people, and convicts in the same category. To be tipsy signified to be led off disgracefully to prison by the constable. But since leaving Beau-Séjour Pauline's ideas have expanded. She knows now that there are euphuisms for tipsiness, which prove that the offence itself is by no means as heinous as her childish imagination had pictured it. Still, the early association of ideas renders the possibility of being *drunk*, as connected with any gentleman whom she herself is ever likely to know or meet, quite out of the question. It is therefore with no other idea than the one that poor George has been too much in the sun, that she unwittingly draws attention to his condition by her compassionate insistence upon his paleness.

"You should have held up your white umbrella, George; indeed, you should. I've seen you going about all day in that tall hat—and you look as though you had such a *dreadful* headache. Doesn't he look as though he had a dreadful headache?"

The last words are addressed to Sir Francis Segrave, with a sudden tremulous note of appeal in them. George's headache has given him an expression that fills his wife with a new and vague terror that she does not dare to formulate even in thought.

He does not answer her inquiry about the headache. He is fumbling under the seat of the hired brougham which brought him and Pauline to the races in search of a sandwich box, and his body is swaying like that of a seasick passenger on deck in a rough sea.

"Oh, George, what *is* the matter? Do you feel faint? Are you ill?"

There is sharp distress in her tone. George turns round with a vacant stare, and holding to the open door of the brougham as to the bulwark of a rocking vessel, eyes her with a silly smile.

"Don't you fluff, old girl; I'm all right." Only he says "*don't shoe*," the articulation of the "*you*" being quite beyond him at the present moment. Pauline can further hear some disconnected phrases about "*Vittory*"



and the "dash shun," and then he lets himself slip into a sitting posture upon the ground, with his back against the step of the brougham and his hat on one side—a living presentment of one of Leech's caricatures of the Derby Day, that Pauline has laughed over without understanding it, in the days when she possessed a nursery scrap-book at Beau-Séjour.

The realisation of the caricature is anything but a laughing matter. As long as Sir Francis Segrave lives he will never forget Pauline's face as George slips heavily to the ground. The bewilderment, the apprehension, the horror, and then the sudden agony of shame, that succeed each other all in the flash of an instant. Certainly this must be a new experience; only a woman who had never been brought face to face with such a catastrophe before could be so utterly helpless under it, so overwhelmed by it. Whether to turn and flee, or to sink by George's side and sob—whether to shield him from the view of his new acquaintance, or to run away to some hiding-place where he can never, *never* find her again—the irresolution prompted by these mingled sensations betrays itself, like all Pauline's other emotions, to Sir Francis's keen glance. But to his credit be it said, after a lightning impression of the grandly tragic power of Mrs. Drafton's eyes and lips, he feels a genuine and tender pity for her. And his pity, coupled with the exquisite tact that comes from what the French rightly call *l'usage du monde*, does Pauline such good service in her bitter distress, that it is hardly to be wondered at if she thinks of him afterwards as of some ideal knight made incarnate in her behalf.

In the first place, he entirely ignores the possible explanation of George's condition—the hideous explanation of it that has suggested itself to her through Leech's caricature, but that she would not for worlds breathe aloud—the miserable, humiliating explanation, that makes her cheeks and forehead burn with shame, as though she were polluted and degraded by it in her own person. There is nothing in Sir Francis's manner to convey the most distant hint of his connecting George's indisposition with any other factor but the sun. It is with the prudence of the serpent and the strength of the lion that he gently aids—almost lifts him into the brougham, where the victim of Victory's exploit will be entirely



sheltered from the amused and knowing glances of grooms and coachmen. Then the air with which he turns to the victim's wife is such an absolute triumph of acting that it actually deceives Pauline herself. "Poor fellow!" he says. "But you mustn't be in the least alarmed, Mrs. Drafton; I assure you I've seen fellows in India taken exactly in the same way. It's a slight—a *very* slight case of sunstroke. I've had plenty of experience in cases of the kind."

"But it seemed to affect his brain," says Pauline, fastening her two frightened eyes upon her ally, and hugging herself in the belief that the horrible suspicion she has entertained is at least entirely unshared by him.

"That's one of the symptoms," replies Sir Francis. Not even the shadow of a smile flickers in his calm grey eyes as he makes this astounding statement. "We must keep him very cool and quiet for a bit. I'm going to bandage his forehead with a wet handkerchief, and you'll see he'll be all right in another hour. About what time did you think of going home?"

"I don't know" (looking very blank); then after a pause, "We're staying at Scott's, you know?"

"Well, you won't refuse to let me see your husband home with you. He'll want to get back himself as soon as he's a little better, and I *must* see my patient through, mustn't I? May I call and inquire about you both to-morrow?"

"Oh, would you?" says Pauline, with such transparent satisfaction that Sir Francis can hardly repress a smile. "What time will you come?"

"At whatever time you will let me. Now for the operation."

While speaking he has been dipping a clean table-napkin drawn by Pauline from the sandwich basket into a can of fast melting ice, and now he proceeds to bind it round George's head, which is lolling against the cushions of the brougham in sleepy and undignified unconsciousness.

"What the Dickens!—what the devil!" splutters the recipient of this attention, as the icy drops roll over his forehead and ears and trickle down the nape of his neck.

"It's to do your head good," says Sir Francis firmly; "you've been too much in the sun, you know."



George's eyes fix themselves stupidly and glassily upon the strong earnest countenance that meets his gaze. Then, with an unsuccessful attempt at a wink, intended to convey the existence of some confidential and secret understanding of tremendous importance between himself and the person upon whom it is bestowed, his head falls back again upon the cushions, his eyes close, and he sinks into a heavy sleep.

"We'll leave him to sleep a bit, eh?" says Sir Francis, closing the door of the brougham, with a parting look at his patient huddled in the corner of it. "There's nothing like sleep for a sunstroke. And now I think *you* want looking after, do you know? I'm going to prescribe for you, and you've got to do just what I tell you."

And Pauline finds cushions and rugs arranged for her in a kind of divan, in a shady spot near the brougham, and a tumbler of delicious iced water, perfectly pure, presented to her lips—and her little flounced parasol deftly opened and held up just as a group of inquisitive people pass her. If she raises her eyes only for an instant, they are sure to encounter the eyes that seem already to know her through and through. What is there in the expression of them that gives her that unaccountable feeling with regard to their possessor?

Let cleverer heads than Pauline's divine the reason. The fact remains that, though her acquaintanceship with this man extends over a very few hours, even with the period of last year's waltzes thrown in, it seems to her that she has known him for almost as long as she can remember. Oriental philosophy would account for the impression by the convenient word "*Kismet*;" and who can say whether Oriental philosophy is not right? Does not the new science of sociology deprive us logically of moral responsibility? and for whatever cause we are forced under given conditions to follow a certain line of action, whether because of our inherited tendencies (according to the sociologists), or whether because of the will of the gods (according to Greek mythology), are we not in either case the victims of circumstances? Fortunately these speculations have never hindered humanity from acting as though Pope's lines were strictly true—

"And binding Nature fast in Fate  
Let free the human will."



Nor do they prevent Sir Francis Segrave from hesitating, at the close of that day, between two opposite courses, either of which he certainly believes himself entirely free to follow. The first is to set sail (or rather to get up steam) for a journey to South America not later than the morrow. The second is to stay and accept the consequences.

Pauline meanwhile has no misgivings. Reviewing her day as she sits in solitary state in a big arm-chair in the fine sitting-room George has taken for her at the hotel, it seems to her as though her whole world had changed since the morning. Whatever may happen in the future, she will always have the certainty that there exists in the universe one sure friend who cares about her. And such a friend! She will never forget the close of this eventful day. How Sir Francis Segrave left all on purpose to follow her and George home in a waggonette. How, arrived at the hotel, which was mercifully bare of loungers, every one being at the races, he had helped the victim of sunstroke upstairs so speedily and quietly that nobody could have guessed anything was the matter. How, after George (who seemed not to know in the least where he was, and who had muttered phrases that had no sense in them) had stumbled into the bedroom, and thrown himself full length on the couch, Sir Francis had stood irresolute for a moment in the sitting-room when Pauline came out to wish him *good-bye*. How he had looked into her face anxiously when she held out her hand, as though it had distressed him to see her looking so pale and so frightened. How he had seemed on the point of saying something he did not say, and how, when she had placed her hot hand in his firm cool grasp, he had taken it in both his palms, and asked her if she would look upon him henceforth as her friend.

"Yes, indeed," she had replied with a full heart; "and I am very, very grateful for all you have done."

At which he had laughed. It was rather a strange laugh, and Pauline did not quite understand it.

"There are no favours between friends," he said. "But tell me, how long is it since you—since you left Sydney? I thought I should find you there again, until I met you this morning."

"Oh, are you going to Sydney?" Pauline had asked,



with rather a downcast face, neglecting to answer his question. What if *her* friend should be Jamesina's friend too?

"No, I'm not going to Sydney. There's nothing to take me to Sydney now." He had said the last few words half to Pauline and half to himself. Still she had not gathered their full significance. "And how long is it since you left Beau-Séjour—wasn't that the name of it?"

"A long time," Pauline had made reply. "Nearly a whole year."

Her voice had taken, all unconsciously to herself, an inflexion of weariness and dejection. Measured by her sensations, it seemed as though she had spent an unheard-of time at Rubria. And this was only the beginning.

Then Sir Francis had gone away, and half an hour afterwards there had arrived a parcel with two or three new books: "Cometh up as a Flower," which was still a recent publication, and which Pauline had never seen, and a dainty copy of Matthew Arnold's latest poems, and an almost new French novel, "Renée de Mauperin," with pencil-marks against various passages. Pauline's heart beat with delight as she took up each separate volume. Who but her *friend* would have thought of such a treat for her?



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### *THE DAY AFTER THE RACES.*

"Thy head is as full of quarrels as an egg is full of meat."

—SHAKSPERE.

THE trail of the serpent that is over every joy translates itself for George, on the morrow of the Melbourne Cup, by a racking headache. Even the recollection of the proud position he now occupies, as the owner of the winner of the Melbourne Cup—a position which will make his name a household word throughout the length and breadth of Australia—cannot alleviate his pains. Not even the cheerful aspect of the sitting-room, into which he creeps between nine and ten o'clock, there to discover all manner of most agreeable reminders of his triumph. In the first place, there is a pile of letters and telegrams waiting for him on the breakfast table—more than he has ever received before in the space of twelve months together. In the second, the sandy-haired waiter, who pompously removes the cover of each nickel dish that he disposes on the snowy cloth, while he announces "Flounders freetes, shartobriang and pomm-di-tare-rotty," with a gravity that makes the corners of Pauline's lips twitch involuntarily—this same solemn waiter begs "'umble leave to hoffer 'is 'arty congratulations" (with an emphasis on the "'arty" that finishes Pauline off completely) "to Mr. Drafton 'imself. For though I 'ad a small interest on the race myself," he adds confidentially, "which I 'ope, sir, you won't mind my saying it wasn't, so to speak, *your* 'orse I favoured, I'm just as pleased as though I'd won. I'm better pleased, in fact, for I like to see Victoria to the front."

George nods good-natured but feeble assent. If it were not for his head, he would be curious to know what horse the fellow had backed. Anyhow, he shall not lose by his mistake. The owner of the winner of the Melbourne Cup must know how to give "tips" in



more senses than one, and the waiter's right-minded preference for things Victorian shall be duly rewarded. Meanwhile, the first essential is to get hold of a tonic or pick-me-up of some kind, to relieve this dashed headache—and the next to know why Pauline, seated behind the breakfast tray with a book in front of her, should look so *glum*. *She* hasn't got a headache—she looks as fresh as a white rose. What the devil has she got to complain of? Isn't he ready to get her the handsomest locket in Kilpatrick's shop—the grandest silk dress at Alston & Brown's? Is it not on *her* account, far more than on his own, that the honour and glory of the great event of yesterday fill him with pride and rejoicing? If to be the wife of the owner of the winner of the Melbourne Cup is not enough for her happiness, he would like to know what *would* satisfy her. For himself, he gives it up. George's imagination indeed fails to conceive any stronger cause for joy and exultation than the landing of the greatest race in the world! And here is his wife, who ought to greet him with fond rapture (like a kind of conquering hero), sitting, with a face fit for a funeral, wrapped up in some twaddling book. Not even reading the account of Victory's triumph in the *Argus* and the *Age*, that lie damp and unfolded upon the tablecloth. Such conduct is really calculated to spoil all a fellow's satisfaction. As if a beastly headache were not enough to bear at a time for any man!

Under the weight of his double tribulation, George seats himself opposite to his wife with a portentous sigh, and essays to arouse her attention by a series of ejaculations expressive of wonder and consternation, as he fussily opens the envelopes containing his telegrams and letters. But the expedient is not attended with success. When he finally looks up, the foreshortened view of a soft fringe of dark hair and eyelash, a straight little nose, and two firmly-closed red lips, is all that meets his eyes. It is evidently necessary to alter his tactics.

"I'll take a cup of strong tea, if you please, when you'll *condescend* to pour it out for me, Mrs. Drafton!"

His efforts to throw a bitterly satirical inflexion into this polite request do not, even to his own hearing, strike him as sounding quite so effective as he had intended.



Pauline, with her book still open in front of her, pours out his tea mechanically; her eyes return to the page almost before her husband has taken the cup from her hand.

"I've a good mind to throw that dashed book out of the window!" is George's next complaining observation, without any covert irony this time. "What new lay are you on to, I should like to know—what's the matter with you? Why, you ought to be the proudest, happiest woman in all Australia at this moment. And there you sit, with a face as long as a fiddle"—here George made an ineffectual attempt to mimic his wife's expression—"just as if you were reading the Bible—upon my soul!"

But even in the teeth of this new form of indictment Pauline remains mute, only turning over another page with an air of being absorbed in its contents. Then George makes a sudden raid upon the book across the table, and snatching it from beneath his wife's eyes, throws it with violence upon the sofa.

"*That's* to teach you manners, madam! You'll please answer when you're spoken to, next time."

What a singular expression of face it is that Pauline turns towards him. In all his experience of her, he has never seen her look like this. There is a scornful defiance written in every line of it, and her voice sounds hard and incisive as she answers slowly, "I don't want to learn manners from a drunkard, thank you."

"A drunkard!" For an instant George is speechless with rage. How dare she? How dare she?

"You'd better be careful how you say that again, I warn you!" and this time his wife is fain to hold her peace, for his voice and his gesture almost threaten that inconceivable humiliation, a blow! She sits silently therefore, with an inward shrinking, as her husband continues in the same angry tone, "You're such born fools, you women! it's enough to sicken one, upon my word it is. I'm not going to deny that I was a bit tight yesterday—a man doesn't win the Cup every day of his life. You ought to coddle me up to-day like anything, if you were half a wife; and I'm dashed if you don't put on the airs of a tragedy queen and call a fellow names. It's bad enough to feel like a sick monkey without that."

Thereupon George buries his aching head in his hands



and groans. There is silence between the husband and wife, only broken by the hissing of the tea-kettle on its spirit-lamp stand, and the indifferent crunching of brittle toast between Pauline's teeth. All of a sudden George thrusts his empty cup and untouched plate away from him and jumps up from the table.

In spite of the natty suit, and well-trimmed hair and beard, there is something of the air that the Scotch call feckless in his bearing this morning. Not at all the air becoming the conquering hero that he feels himself to be.

"Well, I'm off to the races again; do you want to come?"

"No; I thank you."

There is nothing conciliatory in Pauline's tone, and George's wrath rises again.

"No? I guessed as much. Well then, I'll go and get on the spree again. Do you hear? I'll give you something to talk about this time. You shan't call me a drunkard for nothing, I can tell you that. I'll go and amuse myself; you can mope here, if that's what you like. I don't care. I don't care a rap. You can go to the devil for all I care."

He has been adjusting his racing-glass, gathering up his hat and gloves, making tumultuous excursions into the adjoining room in search of his dust-coat and umbrella, all the time he has been breathlessly firing off these disjointed sentences. Now he has reached the door of the sitting-room, and his hand is resting upon the handle of it. Curious to say, in the midst of all his bluster George is really suffering acute mental pain. If he were to follow the dictates of his heart, he would be down upon his knees with his head upon Pauline's lap, ready to heap opprobrium upon his own shortcomings, willing to swear by all his love for his idol that this should be the first and last offence.

But how is he to approach that cold statue? Even in the polished shimmer of her cool morning dress of white grass cloth there seems something that forbids him. There is not a sign of softening in her face. It hardly seems worth her while to notice his presence at all.

Wounded affection, mortified vanity, rage and longing, all these struggle for mastery during the fleeting instant in which George remains with his hand upon the door



of exit. Then he opens it violently, and rushes down the stairs to hail the first passing waggonette that will take him to the races. His parting salutation to his wife, whom he loves beyond expression, has been to declare that she may go to the devil for all *he* cares. No wonder he feels his world out of joint as he jumps on to the Flemington platform, just in time for a train. Even now he would turn back, and throw all his stake in this day's racing to the wind, if he could only dare to hope he might be taken back into favour. But there is already a rush for the train, and George ended by letting himself be borne along with it.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *PAULINE ARGUES WITH HER FAMILIAR.*

"I have no other reason but a woman's reason,  
I think him so because I think him so."

—SHAKSPERE.

THAT end of Collins Street, known as Collins Street East, where doctors most do congregate, with its broad pavements and tall houses, so uncolonial in design and execution, was already an imposing quarter of Melbourne at the period when Sir Francis Segrave looked out upon it from the reading-room of the Melbourne Club, whither he had betaken himself after breakfast, the morning following the eventful day at the Cup. He carried a pile of letters in his hand, most of which, judging by the gloss and thickness of the envelopes—for rough-edged, hand-made notepaper was not then in vogue—contained dinner invitations, picnic, croquet, dance, and fancy-fair invitations. Sir Francis at the present moment was the lion of the Melbourne Cup season. The genus known as the distinguished stranger was more rarely to be met with in the Melbourne of 187— (early in the decade) than in the Melbourne of fifteen years later, and its appearance was the signal for a general flutter in the camps of matrons and of those young ladies who were out or coming out in the world.

But dinner, picnic, croquet, dance, and fancy-fair invitations were destined alike to meet with a courteous refusal. According to the French proverb which says that "*La nuit porte conseil*," the hours Sir Francis had passed since leaving Scott's hotel the preceding day had gone far to confirm his idea that the best and wisest thing he could do would be to carry into effect his half resolution of the evening before of clearing out for South America at once. For South America, or for any other place as far removed from Australia as possible, New Zealand perhaps to begin with. He settled in his own mind that he would start that **very**



afternoon. There was a steamer leaving direct. And he would give orders for the yacht to follow him as speedily as might be. From New Zealand he would take the yacht to Rio. It was well to have some definite goal in view, even though the motive for sailing from Australia should be much the same as the one for which we take a constitutional walk—to wit, because it is good for us.

Sir Francis felt more at ease after he had registered this resolution in his own mind. He even glanced down the columns of the papers, in one of which Victory's name blazed forth triumphantly in large capitals. The fresh longing to remain that the association of ideas evoked by Victory's name aroused in him almost obliged him, it is true, to fight the battle over again. But he was so convinced that discretion was really and truly the better part of valour in the present instance, that the struggle was not of long duration. To put an end to it, he began to write a series of notes declining the aforesaid invitations for the reason of his unavoidable departure from Melbourne at an earlier date than he had anticipated. Then he looked at his watch. Eleven o'clock! It could not be considered too early for a morning visit; and there would be very little time as it was, and so much the better perhaps for making his adieu before taking himself off for good.

Half an hour later the solemn, sandy-haired waiter was replying to Sir Francis Segrave's inquiry whether Mr. and Mrs. Drafton were at the hotel.

"I can't say for certing, sir. It's *my* belief they've gone to the races—though Mrs. Drafton might be hin. I'll *hascertain*, if you please."

It struck the visitor that this would have been the most rational course to take at the outset, but he made no comment. He stood stroking his moustache in the hall below, after a fashion peculiar to him in moments of doubt and indecision. If Mrs. Drafton should be really out, he wondered whether he would find the resolution to pen a few farewell words upon a card and leave it with the waiter. He was bringing himself in this direction up to the point of feeling for his pocket-book, when he of the sandy hair returned.

"Hif you'll be so good as to step upstairs, sir," he said.

In Greek mythology, the victims of the vengeance of the gods were ever oppressed by a dark foreshadowing



of the irrevocable destiny that lay in wait for them. For all we know, Paris and Helen may have wept for pity of the sorrow and bloodshed that their flight would bring upon the world, even at the time when it seemed to them that the world was well lost for love. But they could not help themselves, for a stronger than they had decided their course; and no doubt they admitted that there were "compensations." Still the haunting sense of threatening evil must often have hung over them like a cloud.

In the same way, as Sir Francis deliberately ascended the staircase of Scott's Hotel in his correct morning suit, ushered to the door of Pauline's sitting-room by the solemn, sandy-haired waiter, a curious presentiment, as of some danger he could not avert, and could only have explained as Mrs. Nickleby explained her pain, by saying that she felt it somewhere in the room, mingled itself with the satisfaction he could not refrain from feeling at the certainty that he should meet Mrs. Drafton face to face once more before leaving her *for ever*. The presentiment was stronger than ever as he reached the top of the stairs, and was answerable for the expression of his face and the tone of his voice as he entered the room where Pauline was seated.

"How d'ye do?" he said, in the most conventionally courteous tone he could assume, as she half rose from her seat to greet him. "I'm so glad you haven't gone to the races. I should have missed you altogether. I've come to—to say good-bye."

"To say good-bye!" echoed Pauline; there was surprise as well as dismay in her voice. "I didn't know you were going away so soon."

She had not stirred from her seat since George had left her an hour ago, and the book in which she had been so apparently absorbed was still lying where he had thrown it on the sofa. She had been arguing with her familiar; and she was not sure, even now, that this intrusive personage had not had the best of the argument. Her familiar had been making, indeed, all manner of suggestions. "Why should things be so unevenly balanced?" it had said. "You have your own wants in life, your own individual happiness to consider. Why should you go on eternally forcing yourself to maintain your husband in a fool's paradise. Will you act the dreary comedy throughout all the ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years



of life you may yet have to drag along your existence?" Pauline had shuddered at this suggestion. As long as we are in our teens, ten years seem an appalling stretch of time to take into consideration.

"It is not even just to him, to your husband," the familiar had continued; "it is an unnatural state of things, and from pitying him, you will come to dislike, and perhaps to hate and to loathe him. It is very much his own fault. He *would* have you—*coûte que coûte*, as your grandmother said, and he knew that you only married him out of gratitude. He took advantage of you. It was not generous. It was hardly honourable." "But what am I to do?" Pauline had said in despair. "*Do!* there are a hundred things to do," the familiar had replied scornfully. "You are young and strong; you have a good pretext now for running away; your husband was tipsy yesterday (Pauline shuddered again)—it won't be the last time—and he told you to go to the devil this morning; he would have struck you if you had told him once more that he was a drunkard."

After the familiar had harped upon this theme a while longer, various schemes had suggested themselves to Pauline's brain. She would write a long explanatory letter to George. Even while she was concocting the phrases of it in her mind, especially the one in which she would adjure him to be happy and to forget all about her, tears of pity for him started into her eyes at the vision of his finding her epistle and reading it all by himself. But it was the most *just* thing she could do. He would suffer—of course he would suffer (it was curious how the tears continued to well up during this phase of her reverie); but had she not suffered too?—and he would get over it. She herself would already be far on her way, for she intended to return forthwith to her grand'mère and Chubby. George had given her plenty of money to spend in Melbourne, and she would pack up her things in a very short time. Supposing she were to take the long overland route to Sydney to throw George off the scent? There were coaches part of the way, and she could walk part too. She would write to Beau-Séjour at once. Grand'mère would keep her secret. Oh, what a welcome would await her! Perhaps poor grand'mère half expected her. There would not be the least sparkle of triumph in her eyes (at least



not at first), only she would hold out her arms to her foolish child. Pauline thought now of a flaming oleograph on the wall of her Uncle Chubby's nursery, representing Noah, in a gown of brilliant Prussian blue, drawing in the dove that had flown from the Ark, but had found "no rest for the sole of her foot" on the wild waste of waters without. Pauline would be the returning dove, and Beau-Séjour would be her ark of refuge. But should she start off at once? Action of some kind was necessary. To sit brooding with her familiar in that strange room, while the exasperating clock on the mantelpiece took hold of her unspoken phrases and ticked them forth with monotonous persistence, was fast becoming unendurable. She felt restless and reckless. It was just when she had reached this stage of her reverie that there was a tap at the door, and Sir Francis Segrave was ushered in.

After announcing his speedy departure, in obedience to the resolution already recorded, Pauline's visitor seated himself on the sofa, next to the discarded book. He held his hat upon his knees, as though to remind himself that his time was limited, and said, though with less determination than at the outset, "Well, to tell the truth, I didn't know myself that I should have to be off so soon. But I've had letters from home."

It was on the tip of his tongue (to use a familiar but very expressive mode of speech) to say that he had received a telegram from home—cable communication being as yet not completed between Europe and Australia—but he remembered himself in time.

His announcement was followed by a moment of complete silence on Pauline's part. Sir Francis waited, while the exasperating gilt timepiece on the mantelshelf whirled and buzzed laboriously as a preliminary to bringing itself up to the point of striking half-past eleven. Then he raised his head, and directed one of his rapid, searching glances at the mute figure seated opposite to him. As his eyes took in the forlorn form and its surroundings, a curious feeling, quite new to his experience, came upon him suddenly—a feeling of great pity and tenderness, that had nothing to do with the other stronger, more personal, more selfish sensation he had been aware of hitherto. It seemed as though this child, or girl, or woman, for she was all three, was in sad



want of some one to look after her. What did her husband count for? To Sir Francis's contemptuous fancy, George, whom he had seen for the first time yesterday (and then only in the worst light in which that unfortunate young man had ever shown himself), whom he found absent now for the day, while his wife was sitting alone in a strange hotel, her eyes shining with the traces of recent tears, Mrs. Drafton's husband counted for nothing, or for worse than nothing. And yet he represented apparently all the protection, companionship, support, and counsel she possessed in the world. The sole staff she would have to lean upon through the long years to come—for surely she was only on the threshold of womanhood as yet. In her cool white frock of glistening material, with an old-world ruff encircling her polished throat, she looked just as though she might have stepped out of some high-bred canvas of Van Dyck's; she appeared centuries old in one sense, and not very many actual years old in another. The same quaint inconsequence might be traced in her manner and tone of thought. So prematurely old and logical when some abstract question was under discussion, so unpractised in all the ways of the world, so naïve and almost childish with relation to ordinary topics and conduct. Even in the present instance, it was absurdly unconventional and unguarded to sit there, with her red lips quivering like a child disappointed of a treat. Sir Francis could not divine that Pauline had been through a scene, and that she was unnerved and unhinged by the suggestions of her familiar. He only saw that she was lonely and unhappy, and wanted, in homely phraseology, "cheering up." The reaction that was taking place in his sentiment threatened to be the most dangerous manifestation of it that had as yet occurred. But it took a specious and treacherous form that deceived even his own keen understanding. He had been through two phases already. In the first one, it is to be feared that Pauline had appeared to him in the light of fair game, as any other charming young woman might have appeared in the like circumstances. In the second phase, her innocence, her helplessness, her entire trust in him, had touched some unaccustomed chord in his nature. It was during this phase that the South American scheme had taken shape in his mind. It had still held good



when he came to pay his farewell visit. But now the third phase—the most fatal of all—was growing upon him. Supposing he were to stay for a while, and watch over this child or this woman? Stay for the sake of giving her chivalrous protection and sympathy and counsel. As for the consequences—but why measure the consequences? It would be sweet to have her letters—if nothing else. And she was in such sore need of a trusty friend.

It was with inconceivable rapidity that the foregoing train of reflections passed through Sir Francis Segrave's brain. The pause had been only of short duration, and Pauline had barely had the time to bring her voice under control before he was speaking to her again; only this time he said nothing about going away.

"What did you intend to do to-day?" he asked her, somewhat abruptly.

Pauline raised her head. "I don't know." Her voice had taken rather a plaintive intonation. "I haven't thought." Then with a sudden gleam of animation—"But I've got those lovely books you sent me; I've begun 'Renée de Maupérin.' It's going to be wonderfully interesting."

"You don't know any one in Melbourne?"

"Not a soul, excepting George's uncle; but he's in New Zealand, and—and he's *horrid*."

"Well, I don't know a soul either, excepting those people I was with yesterday, and though I must leave Melbourne soon, I have the whole day on my hands. Do you know what—it would be very nice of you, very charitable too, if you'd take me round and show me some of the sights. If you knew any friend who would like to accompany you?"

The last phrase was flagrantly a sop thrown to Mrs. Grundy, who, for all he knew, might be a respected acquaintance of this charming young matron's.

But Pauline, as Mrs. Croker had once said, belonged to a set that had no principles. She had heard very little of Mrs. Grundy in the course of her free and happy life at Beau-Séjour; and as regarded the conduct of married women, Fifine's affirmation, that *une femme mariée peut tout faire*, was the only rule of conduct she remembered. In her present mood, escape from her familiar seemed the most urgent necessity of all, and Sir Francis's proposition opened the pleasantest door of escape she could



imagine, now that the execution of that scheme of an immediate departure for Sydney must be deferred for a day or two. That Mrs. Grundy, who is ubiquitous enough to haunt even the rare spots upon our all too little planet in which "one does not know a soul," should frown upon the proceeding, did not, to tell the truth, present itself to her mind. Even as regarded her present relations with George, it was to his advantage that she should escape from the *ennui* of a solitary day in a strange hotel. *Ennui* always brought the familiar in its wake, and the familiar was George's worst enemy. So that for him, as well as for herself and for everybody concerned, an hour or two delightfully and *improvingly* spent in Sir Francis Segrave's society was the very best thing that could be thought of.

"No, I haven't any friends," she said demurely, "and I don't even know what there is to see in Melbourne; but we could find *something*, I'm sure." Her eyes were dancing as she spoke, and her visitor was fain to smile in spite of himself.

"Of course we can find something," he repeated, with an air of decision that seemed to settle the question beyond dispute. "I've heard there's a picture gallery at the public library here. Have you seen that?"

"No; and I've wanted to for ever so long."

"Then we'll go there at once. By-the-bye, when do you expect your husband home—with another tale of Victory? There's scope for a *jeu de mots* of some kind in tale of Victory, isn't there?—though I don't quite see how it's to be worked up."

"Perhaps it will be a tale of defeat," said Pauline, laughing. The sunshine had come back into her face with astonishing celerity. "But I don't suppose George will come away before the races are over."

"H—m"—a great deal of expression may be sometimes condensed into a "H—m"—Pauline could not quite divine what Sir Francis's "H—m" might signify in the present instance. But he jumped up suddenly after uttering it, and pulled out his watch.

"I must go to the club first and write a note—from there I will go straight to the library. Will you be there, at the entrance, in three-quarters of an hour exactly? I don't know, of course, whether you're more *unpunctual* than the generality of your sex."



"I'll be exact, I promise," said Pauline, smiling; but Sir Francis insisted upon making her go over the arrangement again, to be certain that she understood it clearly. She must not be guided by the noisy clock, which was at least ten minutes slow. And if she took a waggonette—which would be the best way—she must allow ten minutes for the drive; and she must be sure to ask for the public library, and not for any picture gallery whatsoever.

Pauline was just in that stage of liking when every fresh trait of character in the person liked is a fresh charm. In this stage even what would be considered foibles in another person have a certain fascination, and the precision that might have appeared almost "finiken" (in the idly-busy sense of the word given to it by certain authorities) in an indifferent acquaintance, seemed very attractive and taking in this big hussar-looking individual who had taken her under his protection. She did not know, however, that this insistence on Sir Francis's part was due in a great measure to the fact that he entertained very unflattering doubts as to her capability for taking proper care of herself. If it had not been for Mrs. Grundy, who might possibly be in league with the solemn, sandy-haired waiter, he would have carried Mrs. Drafton off upon the sight-seeing expedition there and then, without further demur. But he told himself his other plan was the better of the two. As he stood up to go away, Pauline held out her hand to him mechanically. He bent over it a moment with a courteous bow. The Polish custom, which enjoins a gentleman visitor to kiss the hand of his lady hostess as he bids her adieu, flashed across his memory as his fingers closed upon it. But Poland is a long way from Victoria. He relinquished the supple little hand after a warm pressure, and said gravely—

"I am very glad my plan meets with madame's approval."

Then he left the room swiftly, went down the stairs with a deliberate air, like that of a man who has been paying the most conventional of morning calls, and in his clear male voice ordered the driver of the waggonette in waiting for him outside to take him to the Melbourne Club.



## CHAPTER V.

### A RED-LETTER DAY.

"Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest and youthful jollity,  
Quips and cranks and wanton smiles,  
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles."

*wiles*  
—MILTON.

"HE was pleased that his plan had met with madame's approval." Pauline smiled to herself as she repeated the words in her own mind, bounding into the adjoining room to prepare herself for this delightful expedition. How *could* she do otherwise than approve it? Ask the caged lark if he approves a free flight across the wooded plain, the schoolboy in durance vile if he approves a race across the grassy common. Pauline could hardly steady herself for the necessary operation of "putting on her things." The gloomy reflections of this morning, the scene with her husband, the suggestions of the familiar, all were swallowed up in the contemplation of the few full and happy hours in store for her. The past and the future were forgotten. There was only the present to think of.

George was accustomed to say to his wife, with a certain shrewdness of his own, "You're like that chap in the fable, my old woman, that chap who went plump into a well while he was looking at the stars. I expect you know a lot of things *I* don't, but you don't see farther than your nose sometimes, all the same."

In the present instance, Pauline certainly did not see farther than to the end of the visit to the library. The runaway expedition to Sydney was becoming fainter and fainter. Perhaps things would fall back into their old routine after all. Sir Francis would have to go away, and Rubria would close round her again, and all would be *almost* the same as before, only that day would be so much saved from Time and Fate. Farther than this she did not look ahead.

The getting ready was somewhat impeded by the



flurry of Mrs. Drafton's mind. She bethought herself, however, of looking out of the window before deciding upon her toilette. As the aspect of the streets betokened a rising hot wind, sweeping the warm dust against the passers-by, she wisely retained her dress of cool white grass cloth, from whose glossy surface the dust could easily be shaken off. A small mantilla of black lace, of a kind much affected in those days, covered her shoulders. Every woman would forgive her for hesitating in the choice of the bonnet that was to complete this simple costume. The race-bonnet of yesterday, with its dainty bunch of blush roses embedded in soft clouds of hazy blue tulle of the hue of the summer sky, had been such an assured success! But it was too *apprêté*, as Fifine would have said—it was curious how Fifine's taste exercised its sway upon her young mistress even at this distance—for the simple pleasures of the programme her friend had prepared for her. Pauline laid aside the race-bonnet with a heavy sigh—it was such a *very* becoming one—and turned resolutely to her travelling hat of black straw, of sailor shape, with a little anchor of real silver fastening a band of black velvet round it for its only decoration. She put it on, and thus attired she sat watching the clock, allowing for an ample ten minutes the other way, until it was time to start, and with exaggerated punctuality was mounting, a quarter of an hour later, the flight of steps leading to the entrance hall of the public library.

But, punctual as she was, Sir Francis was there before her.

"I hope you have not been doing the *pied de grue* for long," she said.

"No—unless you want me to say, like the cabman in *Punch*, that 'missing of your pretty face made the time seem three *kervarters* of an hour.' But come along—only you'll have to surrender this first."

He took the little flounced parasol from her hand, and saw it bound up by the guardian in fraternal proximity with his umbrella; then he hurried her through the long dimly-lighted corridor leading to the picture gallery. The hall was almost empty of people, and it was with a feeling of unconstrained enjoyment, such as she had not known since the Beau-Séjour days, that she looked up and down its promising length as she entered.



"Oh, what a lovely lot of pictures! I had no idea there were so many. And now you'll *read* them for me—as Chubby used to say—won't you?"

Sir Francis Segrave's art education dated from before Pauline's birth. It was inherited as well as cultivated, and the possession of an ancestral collection of valuable pictures had been an incentive to study and research in public and private galleries and museums in every country in Europe. In presence of Pauline's wonder and delight, he felt the kind of compassionate tenderness that leads us to say, "Yes, *very* pretty, dear!" to a child who brings us some "Book of Nonsense" monstrosity upon a slate for our admiration. For the Melbourne picture gallery was as yet in a somewhat elementary stage. The *Pilgrim Fathers* and the *Sunset at Rotterdam* were still the pride of the collection. Even the enlarged Sunday-school card, known as *Moses descending from the Mountain*, had not taken up its ambitious position opposite the far finer picture of the *Brigands*. And the greater number of charming and valuable paintings since added were still wanting. Nevertheless, Sir Francis could not find it in his heart to throw the least chill upon his companion's enthusiasm. He did not even have the air of making a concession as he stood with her against the balustrade, and saw her eyes wander with keenly interested delight over the figures in the *Pilgrim Fathers*, only he could not refrain from saying—

"There's a strong family resemblance, don't you think?"

"Ye—es!" said Pauline hesitatingly. "One would like to cut out one or two of the pilgrims, and make a picture of them alone."

"That's a very just point of view," said Sir Francis.

He said no more about the *Pilgrim Fathers*, but he made Pauline seat herself next to him when they came to *Rachel going to the Well*, and gave her the first lesson she had ever received upon the subject of what constitutes a work of art. The topic was inexhaustible, and there was something singularly gratifying to the expounder in the rapt and whole-hearted attention manifested by his audience of one. Pauline felt indeed as though a new world were unfolding itself before her—as though she were being taught to use a fresh sense, the possession of which she had never suspected before. Sir



Francis essayed to describe to her the signification of the *plein air* school of Paris, which he held to be the truest and strongest of all—but declared himself at the same time an eclectic in art (the meaning of which term he had to explain for her). Then they slowly made the tour of the pictures, while he asked her random questions in unexpected places, to see how much she had retained of the signification of such terms as “texture,” and technique, values, distances, and atmosphere, as applied to the various paintings. She came almost too triumphantly out of the ordeal—to her self-constituted professor’s thinking, that is to say. Her whole mind must have been absorbed in the subject he had been treating, to the exclusion of everything else. Besides being a charming woman, she was a surprisingly good child.

He sighed—he hardly knew why, as he came to this conclusion, and stroked his moustache with the gesture peculiar to him when he was thinking abstractedly. Then he pulled out his watch abruptly—as he had done before—and interposed it between Pauline’s eyes and an engraving of Briton la Riviere’s upon which they were fastened.

“What a pitiless person you are. Do you see it’s nearly two o’clock?”

“Oh, and you’re hungry!” cried Pauline penitently. “But who could have dreamed it was so late? I’m going back directly”——

“Back where?”

“Back to the hotel, of course.”

“There’s no ‘of course,’ that I can see. You must be hungry too. Please don’t say you’re not.”

“Oh! but I *am*. I’m very hungry.”

“That’s right. Only we haven’t seen half we’ve got to see yet. We’ve hardly begun. We must get lunch somewhere, and then start afresh.”

“Ye—es,” assented Pauline hesitatingly. “It would be very nice, only”——

In her own heart the project smiled at her, as Madame Delaunay would have said; but the breaking of bread *en tête-à-tête* with her friend did not seem quite the same thing as going to see the pictures under his escort. Yet why should there be more impropriety in eating a sandwich with him than in criticising the *Pilgrim Fathers* by his side? Pauline could not decide this knotty point



to her own satisfaction, and as it was not of a nature to be "gone into" with her companion, she put it aside and held her peace.

"Are there no grounds about here, no nice, pretty, shady sort of place, where one might take something?" inquired Sir Francis. "We could have a little picnic all to ourselves; and you need a rest now. Your head is swimming with all those pilgrims—I can see it is."

The vision of a grassy couch under some spreading tree, in the soft warm air without, and a charming *al fresco* lunch in the company of her friend, offered as a substitute for the highly peppered cutlets that the solemn, sandy-haired waiter would set before her in that big, dreary, solitary sitting-room at the hotel, was too tempting to be resisted. Pauline said as before, "It would be very nice, only"——

The "only" was the last faint protest she found occasion to utter. Sir Francis did not seem to notice it. He piloted her straight out of the building, hardly giving her time to reclaim her little flounced parasol on the way, hailed a passing waggonette with a likely-looking horse, and made her get into it. The waggonette was covered, in prevision of the threatened hot wind—which turned out to be a mere pretence of a wind after all—and Pauline had it all to herself, for Sir Francis preferred going upon the box to consult with the driver. Pauline allowed herself to be driven along without making any comment. By-and-by the waggonette stopped before a great pastry-cook's shop in Bourke Street, and her friend went inside. In an astonishingly short space of time a small hamper was brought out. But while it was being packed, Sir Francis had come more than once to the back of the waggonette, with the expression of an anxious paterfamilias on his face, to put his head inside and address to the occupant such curt and mysterious questions as the following: "I say, are they to put mustard in the sandwiches? Currant-cake or seed-cake? Do you like strawberries and cream? I can get a jar of them put up if you do."

"I love them," said Pauline, laughing at his earnest expression.

When he was gone into the shop again upon this final errand, she had a sudden glimpse of a face she remembered. It was that of the florid-cheeked, precise,



kindly gentleman who had sate next to her at Josiah Carp's dinner-table, and who had talked to her so amiably and patronisingly, taking her, as it appeared afterwards, for a schoolgirl upon a holiday excursion. He paused for a moment in front of the shop-window, looked thoughtfully at the placard announcing fresh strawberries and cream, stroked his chin, hesitated, and went on.

Pauline's cheeks flushed crimson as she saw him. She retreated to the farthest corner of the waggonette, her hands clasped nervously round the flounced parasol, her heart beating tumultuously, "Oh, then, I *am* doing something wrong—*very* wrong," she said to herself, "or I could not shrink so from being seen."

Her cheeks were still burning when her friend returned. This time he got inside the vehicle. The oppression of the terror she had felt kept her silent and almost stern as the waggonette rolled swiftly on its way, out beyond a place called Fitzroy, through roads all unknown to her, on and on for what seemed an interminable way, until it stopped before the gate of a park-like enclosure, which the driver said was called the Royal Park. Here all seemed so bright that Pauline's spirits rose again. The Royal Park was a place strangers went to see as they went to see the public library. Between going to behold living animals, or mute pictures, the distinction did not seem very great. Of course there was the lunch to be considered first, but that was a detail.

After Sir Francis had helped her out of the waggonette, they wandered about for a time upon the slippery grass, beneath the sombre native trees and shrubs. It took a certain amount of preliminary reconnoitring to hit upon a place shady enough, and cool enough, and secluded enough, and attractive enough, from every point of view, to serve as a background for the impromptu picnic. But at last such a spot was found. Then when the hamper had been brought, and the driver had retired to the society of his horse and his pipe with the satisfactory reflection that he had a good job on, Pauline laid the cloth. Sir Francis wanted to do it all himself, but she insisted upon making a symmetrical arrangement of the sandwiches, the cake, and the strawberries and cream upon two table-napkins



spread upon the grass in readiness for them. The only thing she complained of was the *completeness* of the arrangements.

Nothing had been forgotten. There were plates and knives and glasses and spoons, and even an *extra* corkscrew, evidently designed for the opening of a cunning little bottle of champagne that fitted into a socket in the hamper. And there was cool soda-water fresh from the ice-chest. There was no scope for the display of the quality known as being equal to an emergency, there being indeed nothing in the nature of an emergency to contend against. True, some excursive red ants, with jointed backs, crawled upon the corner of the tablecloth to reconnoitre the strawberries, but Pauline held out a twig invitingly to them, and then hurled it into the far distance with the deluded insects clinging to it; and a highly-flavoured pod, green and viscous, fell from a peppermint-tree plump into the dish of strawberries and cream, and had to be fished out. There were also some mosquitoes, which would not allow themselves to be clapped to death between Pauline's ungloved palms, but swung themselves away every time she essayed this mode of treatment upon them as though her hands had represented a kind of Tommy Tiddler's ground specially devised for the entertainment of adventurous insects. But despite these little breaks, the picnic was a great success. The threatening hot wind of the morning had subsided here into a warm aromatic breeze. The air was dancing and shimmering, as though liquid light had been rippling through it. From native myrtle to lightwood, from gum to wattle tree, minas and parroquets were soaring and swooping, filling the air with their joyous squeaks. The crickets were whirring as though they had set into motion the innumerable wheels of some miniature machinery beneath the soil. Everywhere life was rampant. Birds and insects piping through their day without thought or knowledge of a morrow. When lunch was fairly over, Pauline was inspired to suggest that her friend should have a smoke. It was all that was needed to complete his sensuous enjoyment. With his back against the trunk of a tree, and the cigar smoke circling in slowly-dissolving wreaths round his uncovered head, he looked from between his half-closed eyes at the charming picture of the young woman



half reclining on the grass in her white frock. Pauline appeared to him now in yet another light, and the hackneyed lines about Cleopatra, that "Custom could not stale her infinite variety," came into his mind in connection with her. All the sadness of the morning had vanished. Even the vein of serious thought and intelligent ruminating was no longer discernible. Like a true child of nature, she gave herself up to the joy of the hour. It would almost have seemed as though she had not even outgrown the *gamin* phase of her existence, for after a very short rest, she was roaming about in search of manna, of which she brought a dainty heap upon a lake-red gum-leaf as an offering.

"Do sit and talk to me a little," said Sir Francis, in answer to her magnanimous offer to show him where the manna was procurable. "How can you expect a poor old fellow like me to run about after those crumbs of sweets? If you'll sit still and be good I'll tell you a story."

"A story? Oh yes, *please*."

She was down upon the grass again in a moment, her eyes glowing with expectation.

"Now, when are you going to begin?"

Sir Francis had thrown away the stump of his cigar and straightened his back against the tree. In the strong afternoon light, Pauline could see the grizzled threads interposed in the close-setting crop of dark hair that covered his head. There was grey in his drooping moustaches as well, and there were lines in his forehead and around his eyes. But there was a latent energy in his whole bearing that seemed to betoken that the wrinkles and the grey were due to other causes besides those of advancing years. But whatever might have been their cause, Pauline did not consider them further. Her friend's years were a matter of little moment to her. She liked him just as he was—not a day older, not a day younger.

The same searching light that was playing over Sir Francis's locks was illuminating Pauline's face as well. She had also thrown aside her hat, and the ruffled masses of her hair, piled high upon her small head, formed a kind of bronze casque which set off marvelously the pure colouring of her skin. If Sir Francis had compared her a while ago to a canvas of Van



Dyck's he thought of her now in connection with Titian's incarnations of feminine beauty, or the ideal Venetians of Paul Veronese. When she turned her head aside her silhouette made a pure transparent line that would have sent an artist into ecstasies. Sir Francis was an artist in more senses than one, and he felt with regard to Pauline as Wordsworth felt about the little maid he encountered in the village whose beauty made him glad. But gladness of that description is a complicated feeling, and did not prevent Pauline's friend from uttering a restless sigh at the close of these reflections upon her beauty.

The "story" he chose for her was that most charming poem of Laurence's, in which the hero carries eternally in his breast the recollection of the magic beauty of the goddess of the woods whom it has once been given him to behold. For ever after under the spell, he lives upon the memory of that glorious vision, devoured by the vain desire of once more worshipping it with his mortal eyes. Sir Francis recited this poem simply, but moved within himself by the sense of its peculiar applicableness to the actual circumstances.

Pauline sate breathless all the time the recitation lasted; her red lips parted, her absorbed attitude plainly denoting that she was drinking in every word. After it was over she drew a long breath.

"Thank you," she said slowly; "I never heard anything so lovely. Do you know any more, or would you mind saying it again?"

"Don't you think it's your turn," he said, feeling for his cigar-case once more, and resolutely looking away from the eager face directed towards him. "Why, you must know some of your school pieces still, I should think."

"I never went to school," with ruffled dignity; "and I don't know why you should treat me as though I were a baby. I learn pieces sometimes to please myself."

"Not to please the owner of Victory, surely," reflected Sir Francis. Indeed, George's name had not once fallen from his wife's lips since the morning. "Well, say anything," he continued aloud. "Do you know any French verses?"

"I know some of André Chenier's," said Pauline, and she repeated the touching lines which the poet puts into



the mouth of the young girl, his fellow prisoner under the Jacobin administration. The refrain, "Je suis trop jeune pour mourir," sounded pathetic and musical as it issued from her lips, so full and ruddy with youth and health, and as Pauline had done before in *his* case, Sir Francis asked for more, without any thought of paying her a conventional compliment upon the charm of her recitation.

But he was not prepared for the sudden change of mood which followed.

"Ah—bah!" as grand'mère says," she cried, jumping up suddenly. "It's too sad. It is not a day for *des idées noires*. Do just look; there's a jackass—a real laughing jackass, on that dead branch. They have such a queer note; like this, you know"——

And upon her companion's startled ears there rang forth, all of a sudden, the most curious, inimitable, guttural, diabolical tremolo it had ever befallen them to hear. For an instant he could not decide whether it was Pauline or the bird that had uttered the sound. If Mrs. Drafton had treated her husband to such a performance, George's enthusiasm would have known no bounds. He would have made her "do the jackass" in season and out of season. But Pauline's accomplishments in this line were unknown to him for the reason that the spirit had never moved her to display them in his presence. Sir Francis, for his part, was immensely amused by the performance.

"I don't know how a human throat can produce such a sound," he said. "But those birds must claim you for a sister. How did you manage to catch their exact note?"

"Oh, it's easy enough," said Pauline, laughing; and as she was now in the vein, she reproduced, with the same startling accuracy, the plaintive chirp of the mina, the droll double note of the wattle-bird, the croaking call of the morepork.

It appeared that this singular young woman was good company in more senses than one. What with recitations, grave and gay—imitations of the notes of wild birds of the bush—and snatches of conversation, unconstrained and delightful, for the very reason that it *was* unconstrained—the afternoon hours galloped by with relentless haste. It devolved upon Sir Francis to take the first reluctant heed of the lengthening shadows and



golden glow of the declining sun. His companion seemed to take no heed of the time. Certainly it was an intoxicating idea to contemplate, wandering about with her in "the glimpses of the moon," but it did not fit with his mood of the morning, which was the one he would fain have found the strength to adhere to. Very gravely the pair walked back to the waggonette. Pauline climbed inside without a word, and Sir Francis loitered in the vicinity, while the driver went for the hamper and pocketed the debris of the lunch for his supper. Before he had time to return, Pauline's friend came and stood at the back of the vehicle in which she was seated, his arms resting on the closed door.

"Have you enjoyed your day?" he said.

They seemed to be quite old friends by this time, and his question sounded as natural, and as free from the least hint of vanity or fatuity, as though it had been addressed to a favourite child by some fond parent who had been giving it a treat.

"Yes; have you?"

It was growing dusk, and within the covered waggonette it was almost dark. But Pauline leant forward as she asked this question, and as under certain circumstances impressions will sometimes rivet themselves upon the mind quite unexpectedly, as though they had been branded upon it in undying characters, so the vision of her face, as it emerged from the semi-obscurity, with the sailor hat pushed back, the soft eyes shining, and the row of pearly teeth gleaming between the parted lips, stamped itself upon his brain thenceforth and for ever. Among the series of mental photographs scored upon the pages of his memory, that one of Pauline's face smiling at him from out of the gloom of the waggonette, was perhaps the most enduring of all. It was *fixing* itself, all unknown to him and to her, as he answered slowly—

"You *know* I have." The words sounded almost solemn, there was so much behind them that remained unsaid. Then he turned resolutely away, and took his place next to the driver upon the box. At the Bourke Street pastry-cook's, where the empty hamper was duly deposed, he dismissed the man, and walked with Pauline to the stand in Elizabeth Street, there to put her into a fresh waggonette, notwithstanding her protestations that she could find her way back by herself.



"I want to know whether you and—and Mr. Drafton" (he hurried over the name of Pauline's husband as though it encumbered him) "would come to lunch with me some day on board my yacht. I should like to show it to you so much."

"It would be delightful," said Pauline. "I'm sure George will say yes. He cares more for horsey things than shippy ones, you know; but I'll make him come."

This was the only allusion to the fact that there was a husband in the case that either of the friends had suffered themselves to make. Sir Francis was puzzled by Pauline's tone. From one point of view it might have argued the completest indifference. From another a wifely avowal of her legitimate influence with her lord. But this was not the only circumstance connected with the moving experiences of the day which Pauline's friend found somewhat mystifying when he came to reflect over them. What Mrs. Drafton herself—notwithstanding her most unconventional conduct—would say and do under circumstances such as most men in his place would seek to bring about, was still, he told himself, quite problematical. But the problem must remain unanswered for the present, if not for ever; for there was only time now for a long lingering pressure of the little ungloved hand laid in his own, before Pauline was whirled out of his sight on her way back to her rightful proprietor.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A PEACE-OFFERING.

"They say best men are moulded out of faults."

It was a great relief to George, on entering the sitting-room at Scott's Hotel between six and seven that evening, to hear a humming refrain from the adjoining room, in a voice that it was rarely given to him to hear under like conditions.

"Je bois—je mange—je chante, je ris; je bois—je mange—avec—e—mes amis. Tra-la, la-la, la-la, la-la, la!" carolled the voice, of which the owner was apparently moving about the room as she sang.

George tip-toed through the sitting-room with elaborate precaution, and stood silently at the half-open door of the inner apartment, looking at the occupant thereof with an expression that would have brought down the house if it could have been utilised for the stage. There was a mixture of shamefacedness and fun and longing written there at one and the same time. A most evident desire also to brazen it out, kept in check by doubt as to the success of such a proceeding, and fear lest he should break the charm that through some unknown agency had been at work during his absence.

"Je bois—je mange—je chante—je ris"—continued the voice.

Then there was a half-scream—"Oh, George, how you terrified me! How *can* you?"

But now the ice was broken. There could be no return to the frigid attitude of the morning. In the space of half a second the owner of Victory had clasped his wife in his arms, and was raining kisses on her unresponsive lips. Such disjointed exclamations as "My old woman! It's been such a wretched day; I dropped a devil of a lot of money—but that's neither here nor there. It's been an out-and-out wretched day—after the way you sent me off this morning," were all he could utter between the intervals.



"Poor George!" Pauline said gravely, when he would give her breath to speak.

Her husband could not guess what a world of significance lay in those simple words. He was only moved by the expression of sympathy, and very grateful for it in his heart.

"But there, I've brought a peace-offering for you," he said, and he held out a large letter with the Sydney postmark. "Won't you give me a kiss for it of your own accord, just for once, old woman? And I've got tickets for the Royal. Charley Matthews is going to play. Isn't that a lark? What have you been doing with yourself all day? But it's no use talking to you when you've got your letters, I know! That little devil of an uncle of yours has the first place in your heart. You needn't tell *me*."

George was bustling about as he spoke, divesting himself of racing-glass and dust-coat, and emptying his pockets of a heap of loose coin. By the time Pauline had read her letters, lingering with tender delight over the unformed copy-book characters in which Chubby informed her that he and the gardener were planting a new shrubbery and "bilding" a new "fool" house, it was time to dine, and the "flounders freetes" and other delicacies had to be hurried through to give time to dress for the theatre. There was not much space left for recording the events of the day.

"Sir Francis Segrave called to see you," Mrs. Drafton informed her husband during the course of the meal, "and we saw the Melbourne library this afternoon. Did you know there were such lovely pictures to be seen, George? I didn't. You *must* see it. And so you lost money, you say. What a pity you can't refrain from betting!"

She despised herself after she had uttered the foregoing sentence. Was it this *afternoon* that she had gone to see the pictures with her friend? Well, it was after twelve, even by the tardy clock; and if George did not inquire where and how she had lunched that day, why should she make it a matter of conscience to inform him? As for the remark about the betting, it occurred in connection with her husband's own disposal of his day, which had not certainly been spent as innocently and profitably as hers had been. It was only because, by some strange anomaly, the most innocent expeditions



*sounded* singular sometimes, when they were narrated in words afterwards, that she did not describe the whole of the day's events in detail. And it was not at all because George stood to her in the relation of a husband that there seemed to be a difficulty in narrating them. To any other kind of husband, one who would have been in sympathy with her tastes and comprehension of things, there would have been, of course, no difficulty or hesitation whatever in recounting *all* her impressions. But then George did not occupy the place of this ideal husband, gifted with a fine and subtle understanding of things, and it was just as well that the passing allusion to his day's losses should have had the effect—that his wife knew it would have—of relegating the information conveyed in the first part of her sentence to the second place in his thoughts.

"Can't refrain from betting!" he echoed, with offended dignity. "I should like to know when you've seen me gamble before in *your* life. A nice character you'd give me all round! You've been taking a leaf out of my uncle's book, I can see!"

He was so occupied in defending himself against this random charge that he found no time to revert to the subject of the pictures at the public library, and before he was quite "through" with his discourse it was time to dress for the theatre. Arriving there late, he forgot everything in the glory of conducting his wife to a front seat in the front row of the dress circle.

Apart from the particular kind of beauty upon which George loved to feast his eyes before the flickering logs upon the homely hearth in the remote Rubria homestead, there was another kind of beauty connected with Pauline which needed a brilliant background, a hall, or ballroom lighted *a giorno*, and a striking arrangement of colour to give it full effect. Against such a background as this the combination of heavily-fringed eyes and scarlet lips, "rare pale" cheeks and bronze-brown hair, stood out like a living picture of loveliness.

To-night Pauline was looking her best. Her eyes and mind were still full of the sun-steeped visions of her afternoon of vagabondism. The theatre was crowded, and George was aware, as they took their seats, that every glass in the theatre was directed towards them. The sweetest kind of incense he had ever known was sending its intoxicating fumes through his brain.



"There sits the owner of the winner of the Melbourne Cup,"—people would be saying—"and that beautiful woman next to him is his wife." How all the world would envy him!

He could hardly control his voice to point out the people he knew, and recount their various histories to his wife. "Do you see that big Jewy-looking man, with diamond rings and studs down there? He's a book-maker, and he cleared five thousand pounds on Victory yesterday. There's such a funny story about his brother. Er-er-er"—and George condensed a whole three-volume novel into a few muttered sentences for Pauline's exclusive benefit. "And that fair man over there. He'll be as rich as Croesus one of these days; and his father came out without a shilling. He began, er-er-er"—Pauline failed to catch the rest. "And just look at that fellow with the pretty woman in black lace and diamonds by his side. He's a regular sport, and he runs *square*; but that's not his wife, though you'd think she was, wouldn't you? She, er-er-er"—more muttered confidences followed. It seemed to Pauline that her husband knew the names and histories of every one in the theatre; though to tell the truth, she found the play infinitely more interesting than the kind of *chronique scandaleuse* which George insisted upon serving up to her. She had never seen "The School for Scandal," and sate in rapt and delighted attention, as the excellent actors and actresses who then figured upon the Melbourne stage, assisted by a waning star from home, gave their admirable interpretation of Sheridan's great masterpiece. At the end of the first act, she was so full of what she had seen that she hardly gave heed to George's fresh outbreak of gossiping comment upon the surrounding audience. Suddenly, however, she heard a name that made her heart beat violently. "I say, Pauline, there's a fellow looking at us through his glasses from the seat over there—a fellow with long moustaches. Isn't it Sir Francis Segrave? I guess he sees us; eh?"

George's voice was agitated, and his face had changed colour. The confused impression he still retained of yesterday's doings was the reverse of reassuring. Of course Sir Francis Segrave must be a man of the world, not a canting idiot like some other people he knew; but even a man of the world might think the



particular moment of assisting with one's young wife at the races a badly-chosen one, to say the least of it, for celebrating the triumph of one's colours after the special fashion in which George had celebrated it yesterday. He could not quite remember either how he had parted from Sir Francis on the preceding day. And he never *could* know, he added ruefully to himself, as he would take particular care never to revert to the subject of the adventures of Cup day in his wife's presence again.

It is a profound truth that nothing is true but thinking makes it so. George's imagination was investing Sir Francis Segrave with the *rôle* of skeleton at his feast, because his own uneasy conscience had risen up and reproached him with yesterday's misdeeds. But his eyes were closed to the real reason for which the "distinguished stranger" might well have assumed the *rôle* of skeleton—not only at the Theatre Royal feast, but in the same secret cupboard wherein George had once stored the mysterious figure of the selector. His eyes were closed, because he was trying vainly to recall how he had returned to Scott's Hotel the day before; and though it seemed to Pauline that surely every one in the theatre must hear the rapid thump, thump of her heart, and be aware of the strained, half-terrified expression in her face, as she fanned herself mechanically, her emotion passed entirely unperceived by her husband. She was glad that she had the time to nerve herself up for what was to follow, before Sir Francis, leisurely rising from his seat, and walking with his accustomed imperturbable air slowly round the back of the boxes, arrived at the part of the house in which she was seated, and descended the steps to the front row, carrying his crush hat under his arm and his opera-glass in his hand. For an instant before his hand touched hers one rapid glance was exchanged between the friends. Pauline looked dazzlingly beautiful, with shoulders and arms like polished marble emerging from a shimmery, crystal-sparkling, perfectly-fitting evening gown—the result of one of Fifine's inspired conceptions. It was not easy to connect her all at once with the holiday-making Pauline of a few hours ago. But the eloquent eyes had not changed; only there was an almost guilty half-scared expression in their brown depths that Sir Francis had not seen there before, and



that gave him a curious twinge of compunction as he noticed it. It was wonderful, nevertheless, how quickly his manner seemed to put every one at ease.

He was unaffectedly cordial towards George, and most courteously deferential to George's wife. If in taking her hand his pressure of it for one fleeting half second seemed to promise reassurance and devotion beyond expression in words, his grasp of George's own hand was very firm and friendly. Just as he had won the latter's heart by his appreciation of Victory and the Flemington course the day before, so he discovered the way to it again this evening by his hearty admiration of the Melbourne stage.

"I have rarely seen better acting," he said; "and excepting that there is a far greater average of pretty faces among the audience, one could almost fancy oneself in London."

"That's what I tell my wife," said George, looking round at her with a triumphant air. "She's always harping on going to Europe. She'll never be content till she's seen home, and all the rest of it. Now, I've never been, and I don't care two straws about going! I know just what it's like. Of course I don't pretend you can get fusty old ruins in the colonies, or that kind of thing; but you won't see finer shops than in Melbourne. You can judge for yourself what the racing's like too. I've heard fellows from home say it's out-and-out better fun than in England."

"Still, Europe has some few little advantages, you know!" said Sir Francis, with gentle deprecation.

Pauline detected the covert irony in his tone, which fell unheeded on George's ear. A moment later the latter hurried off to speak to a fellow who had made him an offer for Victory, and during his absence Sir Francis, who had been standing up hitherto, seated himself next to Pauline's side. It was wonderful, once more, that sense of a friendship of long date—a friendship of which the beginning was lost in the mist of time—that came upon them when they were left alone together.

"Have you told your husband of our day's expedition?" were almost his first softly-uttered words as he seated himself by her side. He had the art of saying the most important things with the most unimportant air. To the spectators themselves at the Theatre Royal, whose glasses still turned themselves as towards a magnet to the



part of the house where Mrs. Drafton was to be seen, he was saying possibly that it had been rather a warm day.

"I told him we saw the pictures," said Pauline in the same low voice, but with a trembling utterance. Burning blushes were covering her cheeks. Between herself and her acquaintance of yesterday there seemed already to exist the bond of a secret understanding.

But Sir Francis made no further allusion to their expedition. He had raised his opera-glass to his eyes, and was affecting to take a survey of the house from the "intelligent visitor" point of view as he once more addressed his companion.

"I want to know," his voice carried exactly as far as Pauline's ear, but not an inch farther, "whether I may ask your husband this evening to fix a day for coming with you on board the yacht. I don't know how soon I may have to go away, and I have set my heart upon your seeing my home. I want to carry away a vision of you among my household gods just as I saw you to-day under the trees."

"I should like to come very much, thank you," said Pauline, replying to the first part of his speech only, and assuming a staid air of conventional propriety which did not deceive him in the least; "and I am sure George would like it too."

"And I am going to ask a favour of you at the same time," he continued. He had laid down the opera-glass and was stroking his long moustache with the gesture Pauline knew so well. His voice was pitched in the same low key as before, but its tone seemed to penetrate now to her very heart. "Will you wear exactly what you had on to-day when you come to see me on board? Of course I should like to have you in your ball-dress too—but that is out of the question, and then I should be frightened by such a resplendent vision when you came floating into my cabin in my dreams. I want you—

‘Not too bright or good  
For human nature's daily food,’

exactly as you were to-day."

As Pauline's downcast smiling eyes did not say him nay, he went on—"I am very superstitious, you know—that makes you open great eyes, doesn't it?—but I am scientifically superstitious, if you can understand. I



have heard or read somewhere, I don't know where, that every shadow makes a real, tangible, durable impression upon the object upon which it is thrown; the book said just as when you stick a wafer on a highly-polished razor, and take it off again, you will see the round of the wafer every time you breathe on the blade for ever and ever after. Of course the impression made by the shadow is too faint for us to see it with our mortal eyes, but we know it is there; and I have a superstition that, under certain circumstances, by a great effort of will and imagination, one can evoke a pale resemblance of it. You see now why I lay such stress upon your coming. I should never be able to raise your ghost satisfactorily if I hadn't the knowledge that you had been actually there in the flesh."

"I don't think your imagination need stop at that, if it can go so far," said Pauline, laughing.

"Ah, but my imagination must have something to work upon," said Sir Francis, with a mock solemn air. "Only fancy breathing upon the razor if the wafer had never been stuck upon it at all. One might expend all the breath in one's body to no purpose. I must be able to say, 'She stood *just* there—she rested here'—before I can evoke my vision. I could evoke it in the Royal Park without the least difficulty"——

At this instant George returned, and Sir Francis proffered his invitation in due form. "To-morrow is Sunday. Could you come to lunch with me on board at one o'clock? Mrs. Drafton will make allowances for the shortcomings of a bachelor establishment, I know."

George looked at Pauline, who was nodding her head at him in token that she wished him to say "Yes."

Sunday at Scott's Hotel, with the gloomy warehouses opposite frowning behind their closed shutters, and the West Melbourne church-goers walking primly by with their go-to-meeting air, did not seem a very alluring perspective. Josiah's golden villa was closed. If museums or galleries had been open, George would not have entered them on the Sabbath. The yacht offered a convenient compromise; for among the objects of interest tabooed by his particular code of Sunday morals "shipping" did not find a place. The force of early association made a walk upon the wharves or a visit to a man-of-war a fitting Sunday afternoon pastime. And if



a man-of-war, why not a yacht? All things considered, George was pleased to accept the invitation. He was not sorry either to have an opportunity of showing Sir Francis Segrave that it was not his habit in the ordinary way to drink more than was good for him.

Pauline's friend did not pay her any more visits that evening between the acts. Notwithstanding his admiration for the Melbourne stage, he left before the play was half over. George remained, as in duty bound, and enjoyed himself immensely. He had forgotten all about his headache of the morning and the money he had dropped during the day. So many of his friends begged to be introduced to his wife that Pauline had quite a levee in her seat in the front row during every successive *entr'acte*. Some of George's old chums did not hesitate to express themselves enthusiastically about her to him afterwards, with the uncomplimentary addition of the observation—"It beats me how she came to have *you*, old fellow!"

"And her looks don't belie her," George would respond, highly gratified. "She's awfully clever, you know—*awfully* clever!"

His voice would drop to a mysterious whisper as he made this communication, after which he would return to his wife with jubilation and triumph in his air.

"You've made quite a *furore*, my old woman—that's the word, isn't it?—quite a *furore*; all the fellows are talking of you."

"Poor George!" Pauline whispered again, under her breath and quite involuntarily this time. But aloud she only said, "I think the 'School for Scandal' interests me more. Hasn't it been a treat, George?"

"Jolly!" said her husband; "but I rather hope the last act won't be so long as the others. I'm going to take you to have some oysters as soon as we can get away."

And after oysters they went. Cloaked and clouded up, with the sparkling evening gown bunched around her, Mrs. Drafton was conducted by her husband, as they left the theatre, to a modest little shop in Elizabeth Street, divided into stalls, and smelling strongly of sea-weed and vinegar. They went there on foot, at her own urgent desire. Bourke Street was thronged as she never had seen it before, and the wide pavement, illuminated by the flaring jets of gas from pastry-cooks' shops and eating-houses, was overflowing with people.



There were families returning late from Paddy's Market at the east end of Bourke Street with their store of perishable bargains in bags and baskets. It was wonderful how Pauline's heart went out to every small boy in knickerbockers who had a look of Chubby. There were rows of hustling, bustling, rowdy youths, of whom some were still so young that their voices gave but strange effect to the mouth-filling oaths they uttered, pushing their way along the pavement with hats tilted back and vile-scented cigars between their lips. Pauline shrank before the fierce onward sweep of these roughs, while George forced a clear passage for her, and damned the larrikins openly.

There were also girls and women, singly and in pairs, with prodigious ostrich feathers in their hats, tremendous earrings and locketts of yellow Australian gold, and a trailing curl, of the description known as a "follow-me-lad," pendent from the nape of the neck. A morbid curiosity impelled Pauline to look into the eyes of these smartly-dressed women as she passed them. A sudden pain and pity overcame her as she looked. It was the first experience she had ever had of the streets of a great city at that hour of the night.

"And oh! *why* are people like that?" she asked herself in shocked bewilderment. "How far can they help themselves, I wonder?" Gaols and hospitals, mad asylums and the ghastly gallows, outlined themselves before her excited imagination as her eyes encountered some peculiarly reckless, vicious, irredeemable face in the crowd that streamed past her. They were like the dwellers in the City of the Demons in the fantastic Eastern tale grand'mère used to read to her from an old "Keepsake;" beings who, for all their dancing and rioting, had yet on their foreheads the mark of an inward consuming anguish. What drove them to this kind of reckless, fevered existence? Was it the thirst of pleasure only—or was there no kindly family influence to hold them together? Did the renouncing of family ties mean taking the first step along this dreary, delirious road? Pauline shuddered inwardly as she asked herself the question. For a brief instant the lonely Rubria hearth, with George singing "Tommy Dodd" in the arm-chair opposite, and the big kangaroo dogs tapping the floor with their tails at his feet, rose before her like the vision of



a safe and sheltering haven. There lay her home, her duty, and her safeguard. She had chosen her lot, and the anchorage was at least a safe and a sure one. But it was a pity she was so young. Life was so very, very long. And the time to be tided over, before the restless craving for the unattainable *something* she had missed, should be silenced and quieted, seemed almost an eternity to contemplate, unless she could discipline herself beforehand to crucify the ego and all its claims.

George was far from imagining how Pauline's cogitative faculties had been occupied all the time they were walking to the oyster-shop. But as they left it, after what he called "a good tuck-out," and walked up the deserted part of Collins Street, leading towards its western extremity, under the tranquillising rays of a radiant full moon, he was gratified to perceive that she clung to his arm as though its support had become a necessity to her. He wondered within himself whether she clung to it knowingly, and was almost afraid to speak lest he should break the spell. But as they approached the hotel she said suddenly—"George!"

"Yes, my old woman?" he replied, inclining his head, lover-like, towards her lips.

"I want to tell you, George"—

She was speaking rapidly, with great effort. Then some people from the hotel passed her, and she stopped. When she spoke next her voice had become calmer.

"When do you think we shall go—*home*, George?"

"I'll go as soon as ever you like, dearest," said her husband.

What a difference between his feelings as he entered the dimly-lighted sitting-room of the hotel this midnight, and those with which he had rushed out of it only fourteen hours ago! Pauline had spoken of her own accord about going *home*—it was the first time he had ever heard her pronounce that sweet word—and though he had left her all day like a brute, she had behaved like an angel to him this evening! He was a fool to have thrown away the best part of his winnings on the Cup that day, but he would recoup himself yet. And what a triumphant return to the old place they would have when all was said and done! He, and Pauline, and Victory!



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### SUNDAY ON BOARD A YACHT.

"As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean."

—COLERIDGE.

SUNDAY turned out to be a day of still heat. The sun poured down its rays from an early hour upon the gloomy bluestone buildings opposite Scott's Hotel—gloomier than ever under their severely Sabbatarian aspect. George lounged about the sitting-room all the forenoon, while Pauline indited a long epistle in printed characters to her Uncle Chubby, with a sketch of Victory's jockey at the end of it painted in pink and gold with the aid of her box of water-colours. At twelve o'clock the paints were put away, Mrs. Drafton dressed herself in the identical white grass-cloth, black lace mantilla, and sailor hat of the day before, and, carrying her little flounced parasol in her hand, came to warn her husband that it was time to start.

"I don't know whether you've made yourself quite enough of a swell," George remarked, as he looked her up and down according to his habit when they were going out together. "I thought you'd have come out in all your Cup day finery, you know."

"That would be *too* fine," said Pauline hastily; "this is much more suitable. But don't stay to criticise me now, anyhow, George, or we shall miss our train."

The impressions of the evening before had been thrust into the background by the prospect of the happy day (as the Rotherhithe advertisements have it) in store for her.

At Pauline's age the mind as well as the bodily frame is still amazingly elastic. Even the bowling along of the waggonette to the Spencer Street station past the great closed stores, the sight of the sailors of the *Cerberus* upon the Spencer Street platform, with their



picturesque man-of-war clothes and gait, and the uninteresting prospect of square weatherboard cottages, dusty gardens, and unclaimed wastes and swamps, on the way to Williamstown, were so many pleasurable experiences, affording scope for an unending vista of aerial superstructures. Then the interest of looking across the bay as the train neared the Williamstown platform! The sea was as calm as a lake. It lay perfectly quiescent—a dull slate colour, only pricked here and there into silver sparkles where the rays of the sun penetrated the mist of heat that hung over it like a veil of gauze.

Sir Francis Segrave was waiting for his visitors at the station. He had not told them he would be there, but Pauline distinguished his tall form, as it stood a little removed from the groups of commonplace Sunday-outers, with a new perception of the enormous contrast that existed between all ordinary people and himself. Again the tell-tale colour rose to her cheeks. For a minute she felt as though her simple dress were a flaring, flaming advertisement (like the feathers and lockets of the women she had seen the evening before), proclaiming loudly that she had come to show her preference for another than her husband. But George was so unconscious, and was waving his hand with such signs of cordial greeting towards his host, that she repelled the inopportune fancy with indignant shame. She would not even respond to the transient smile that flitted like a flash of sunshine across her friend's face, as he saw her standing at the door of the carriage in her accusing dress.

She bowed constrainedly; and it was George who held out his arms and received her in them as she jumped from the carriage to the platform.

There was a boat in waiting for them at the jetty, manned by six sailors from the yacht, trim and spruce as those of a man-of-war.

There was also a young man, in an ordinary morning suit, who stood up as they approached, and whom Sir Francis introduced to them as "my friend, Mr. Travers, and my one passenger."

Pauline cast a rapid glance at this enviable being, who, as friend and travelling companion of the proprietor of the yacht, was necessarily engaged in the delightful



pastime of viewing, under his guidance, all the marvels of this marvellous world. He was somewhat lank, but the sallow beardless face was rendered interesting by a nervous, humorous mouth, and by two grey eyes of amazing sweetness of expression. He was not probably much older than Pauline herself, and he affected an exaggerated respect for Sir Francis, whom he called indifferently "captain" and "sir."

"You mustn't be deceived in our captain," he informed Mrs. Drafton, in a mysterious undertone, as they went along.

The boat was bounding pleasantly through the water, under the vigorous, even stroke of the rowers, and Sir Francis, on the opposite seat, was giving George technical details respecting the length and beam and tonnage of the yacht, mirrored in the waters of the bay at the distance of half a mile.

"You mustn't be deceived in our captain, you know. You wouldn't believe, to see him on shore, what an *awful* character he is on the high seas."

"No—one wouldn't think it," said Pauline seriously, with an air of entire credulity. "'High seas' is suggestive of any amount of horrors, though. But what does he do, for example?"

"Oh, I could give you the most blood-curdling descriptions, but you'd be afraid to go on board. But you won't *see* anything to frighten you—the cat-o'-nine-tails, and the irons, and all the rest of it! Our captain locks 'em away when he's expecting ladies on board."

"And how does he treat *you*?" said Pauline, laughing.

"*Me!* Oh, I'm a poor, confiding orphan. But he makes my life a burden to me all the same. What I have to suffer when the cook doesn't put enough pepper into the curry!"

"Or when the 'wheel gets mixed up with the bowsprit' sometimes," interrupted Pauline.

"Exactly! I see you know all about it. But, *apropos* of the captain! You musn't suppose it's all gold that glitters on the yacht. I daresay you'll be charmed with the arrangements. But if you get the skipper by himself a moment, you just ask him to show you his Chamber of Horrors."

"I will," said Pauline, "really and truly."

"And then you'll see whether he isn't the 'mildest-



mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat." I hope you don't know where that comes from. It's not nearly as *improving* reading as the 'Hunting of the Snark.' But here we are, by Jove! Those wretched sailors—don't they play their parts well?"

"Wonderfully well!" replied Pauline, laughing. "They're the ideal sailor type—aren't they? Bronzed and muscular and jolly-looking!"

"That's all got up. We've got a bronze mixture on board, and their jolliness is *de commande* too. Oh, it's a wicked world!"

So saying, and with a profound sigh, Mr. Travers rose from his place. The boat was swaying up against the vessel's side, and the first mate was standing at the foot of the staircase to help Mrs. Drafton to alight. With her right hand clasped by the long fingers of her new friend, and her left firmly enclosed in the sinewy grasp of Sir Francis, Pauline stepped from the swaying boat to the staircase, and in another instant found herself on the deck of the *Aurora*.

Mr. Travers had told her she would be "charmed with the arrangements," but the reality far surpassed her expectations. To the initiated the *Aurora* would have appeared simply a handsome specimen of a three-masted schooner, capable of doing from ten to twelve knots within the hour, under steam or sail, in very creditable style. To the uninitiated, like Pauline, the vessel bore the aspect of a great marvellous glittering toy, with its gleaming white decks, burnished adornments of shining brass, long tapering delicate masts, and mysterious network of ropes and spars, through which the hazy sky glowed warmly in the distance.

George was very hearty in his praise. "She's a beauty, and no mistake," he said, as he gazed with the air of a connoisseur around him. "What age may she be, I wonder?"

"I had her built after a plan of my own three years ago," said Sir Francis, "and we've taken her through some queer weather since; haven't we, Travers?"

"Yes, captain," said the young man promptly—then in an aside to Pauline, "and to some queer places too. You ask the skipper what that thing's called, Mrs. Drafton," pointing with a sinister expression to a kind of strong wooden frame standing amidships.



"Yes. What is it called—please?" said Pauline, indicating the frame with the point of the flounced parasol.

"That? Oh, we call it the gallows bits! It's not a promising name, is it?"

"There!" whispered Mr. Travers triumphantly, "what did I tell you? He's *obliged* to unmask himself. If you knew the deeds of horror that gallows could unfold to you! Walking the plank is nothing to them. But there go three bells in the forecastle. We shall have to go to lunch, and then you'll see us dissemble. No one can dissemble better than the skipper—but you musn't be deceived by him."

If it had been possible to connect a hint of serious intention with this particular kind of fooling, Pauline could have fancied that there was a grain of earnestness in Mr. Travers's closing warning. But there was no time for reflecting upon this wild idea, as the lunch bell rang and the whole party went below into the saloon.

According to a new method of construction, the saloon embraced the entire breadth of the yacht, and through the wide open square ports Pauline could see the many-wrinkled ocean, as Homer has it, twinkling and sparkling in blue and silver on either side of her. If the deck had aroused her admiration, the saloon sent her into ecstasies. Against a background of dull red and gold there were collections of curios and works of art such as she had never seen or imagined. Oriental stuffs of exquisitely blended hues—Indian embroideries, Japanese shields, mother-of-pearl implements from the South Seas, wondrous weapons from Borneo, Benares vases, and Chinese paintings on ivory, all these made a medley of harmonious confusion—if the term be not a paradox—that delighted Pauline's starved artistic perceptions immensely.

The lunch was worthy of a gourmet. George, who prided himself upon his discernment with regard to cookery and wines, referred to it afterwards as "licking creation." The Portuguese man-cook had arranged a "menu" worthy of himself, which was the highest praise that could be given to it, and the barefooted, white-turbaned Indian waiter, who assisted the steward to serve the guests, was swift and silent as the legendary slave of the lamp himself.



Whether by design or not, Sir Francis Segrave seemed to address his conversation mainly to George. But in answer to Pauline's questions respecting the mother-of-pearl implements, he entered into a description of his last cruise among the coral islands which fired the imaginations of all present.

"There; that's the kind of travelling I'd like to go in for!" said George; "*that's* sport if you like. I can see my wife's ready to start off this minute by her face!"

"Oh, George, if we only *could*!" said Pauline, drawing a deep breath. "I think it must be like fairy-land."

"Wait till we pull off another Cup!" said George, laughing.

While these few words were being exchanged between husband and wife, Sir Francis had been addressing a hurried injunction in a low voice to Mr. Travers. When lunch was over the latter said to George, "You're not a novice, I can see, Mr. Drafton. If you like I'll show you the fo'castle and the engines. I'd like to hear your opinion too about a kangaroo pup I bought the other day. I don't know if he's the right sort."

"All right," said George, jumping up with alacrity.

"And I'll tell Mrs. Drafton the history of those relics she's examining," said Sir Francis.

The relics in question were long, slender coils of supple, shiny cord, that bore a strange resemblance to human hair. There were necklets and armlets pendent in the neighbourhood of these that seemed to be composed of human teeth.

"That's only the beginning of the Chamber of Horrors," whispered Mr. Travers to Pauline, as he passed her on his way to the deck with George. "There's more where that comes from. There's a regular Bluebeard's chamber below. All this has been manufactured out of its gruesome contents!"

"Do *not* be so silly," said Pauline, laughing; but there was rather an anxious expression in her face as she turned it towards her host after Mr. Travers and George had left them. The hair and the teeth must needs have a history of *some* kind.

But Sir Francis did not seem to be thinking of the relics at all. Pauline's eyes dropped involuntarily as they encountered his. If ever eyes, which are, after all,



the "windows of the soul," allowed the hidden emotions of their owner to look through them, his eyes were performing this treacherous office at the moment of Pauline's looking round. She did not know, for an instant, whether her heart throbbed in sympathy or in anger. But she commanded herself sufficiently to take up one of the coils she was examining, and ask, in a voice that trembled in spite of herself, where it came from.

Sir Francis was standing next to her, against the divan which lined the walls of the saloon. He passed his hand rapidly across his eyes, as though to drive away the vision they had been holding, and said composedly—

"Curious, isn't it? Ever since I got hold of those hair ropes in the South Seas, I have thought there might be something in that story of the women of Carthage cutting off their long hair to make ropes for the defence of their city."

"I remember," said Pauline eagerly. The era of "Ancient History Lessons" was still very fresh in her memory. "It was in the third Punic war."

"That's a good child. You may go to the top," he said, laughing. Then, twisting a coil round his wrist and tugging at it, "You can have no idea of the tremendous strength of these coils."

"They hardly look like hair, they're so coarse and black," observed Pauline.

"No wonder, if you could see the skulls that grow them. Now *your* hair," his eyes wandered over the soft crown that surmounted Mrs. Drafton's uncovered head, "would make a rope of silk; but I daresay it would be just as resisting. It might do for that ideal rope by which sailors imagine that their sweethearts are pulling them across the seas." Then lowering his voice, "You can't think how grateful I felt to you to-day when you stepped out of the railway carriage in that dress I asked you to wear. You're not angry with me for wanting to carry away that image of you, are you? You know I can't help it." His voice had sunk to a whisper, but every word fell distinctly upon Pauline's ear. "*You know how I feel about you!*"

Pauline was silent. Her head was bent, and her cheeks had grown very pale. She could feel (without seeing them) that his eyes were fastened intently and ardently upon her. It seemed to her as though some



strange magnetic spell had been cast over her. But the spell was a dangerously sweet one. When George had told her, with an outpouring of vehement love and passion, that he desired her for his own, "to have and to hold till death should them part," she had tried in vain to feel moved and responsive. Now, all unbidden, after a short three days' acquaintanceship with a stranger, her heart was beating in rapturous agitation at the sound of an unholy avowal murmured in her ear. She had made no effort in one direction or the other. She had followed her instincts and her impulses without let or hindrance. And here was the consequence! Here was the awful consequence! Were her instincts, then, fundamentally depraved? Was she inherently, "*naturally* vicious," as Mr. Bumble said of Oliver Twist? Or was the feeling to which she had done such violence when she had forced herself to accept George's love avenging itself upon her now by waking into life at the wrong time, and for the wrong person? It was horrible. But if it had not been for the spectre of poor George, it would have seemed as natural to lay her head on her friend's breast, and to let his lips seek hers, as though her sentiment had been sanctified by all the laws, written and unwritten, of heaven and earth.

How long the spell lasted, neither she nor Sir Francis knew. He had not intended to betray his secret (if secret it were) just now. But was it a secret at all? From the very first moment of their meeting had they not found themselves drawn towards each other, without will or connivance of their own—almost as though they had been the forlorn separated halves of one whole, according to the doctrine of the sage Plato? His lips had given almost involuntary utterance to his sentiment; but had they not echoed the unspoken response that Pauline's heart was offering all the time? There was not the least alloy of vanity in his feeling. Not a grain of the triumph he might have been supposed to harbour at the speedy acknowledgment of his power by a young and most beautiful woman. He felt rather as though she and he were victims of some relentless destiny, that had thrown them into each other's way for the accomplishment of a pre-conceived plan. Certainly it was not his first experience of a similar adventure, but his sensations with regard to it



were of quite a new order. He had felt strongly before, but never in this particular kind of way. Since he had known Pauline—three days ago—the possibility of anchoring *all* his being—love, desire, ambition—*all* in the affections of one only woman, had come home to him for the first time. It was a theory of his that the quality known as fickleness is, for the most part, only the result of not having found one's "true mate." With Pauline for his own, he would never have wanted to change. More contradictory still, notwithstanding the rapid, almost immediate surrender of her heart to himself—a comparative stranger—he felt as though (had they both been free) he would not have had the least doubt or misgiving in placing his happiness and his honour in her hands. She would have been true and faithful because she loved him. What better guarantee could he wish for? And what a different kind of guarantee from the enforced oath—that even a parrot's beak might be made to pronounce—confusedly murmured before the altar in the course of a bewildering day!

These thoughts, and a thousand others to which they gave rise, rushed through his brain as he stood watching Pauline, with his keen glance, standing silent and trembling by his side.

At last she broke the silence. There was something almost piteous in the appeal of the dark eyes as she raised them towards his face.

"Why do you speak about it?" she said, with a slight involuntary shudder. "What is the use?"

"How can I help it?" he whispered. The white-turbaned waiter was moving noiselessly upon his bare feet round the table, removing the remains of pine-apples and loquats as though he had been wafting them away by magic. At the opposite end of the saloon a half-draped *portière* disclosed part of the interior of a large cabin, abounding, like the saloon itself, in Turkey rugs and Oriental divans. "Won't you come this way?" said Sir Francis abruptly. "I want to show you my collection of Fijian skulls."

The last words were pronounced in clear sounding tones, which did not fail to reach the ears of the slave of the lamp. But they had the unexpected effect of bringing back to Pauline's recollection the ridiculous warnings of Mr. Travers. She followed hesitatingly,



and as Sir Francis held aside the curtain to allow her to pass, she made a half-unconscious movement of her hand as though to open it still wider.

He did not appear to notice the gesture, but following her into the cabin, found her a seat upon a low divan just beneath the wide open port. A heavenly air wandered in from the sunlit expanse without, and caressed her forehead and cheeks. Against the red background, her charming head looked more than ever like a study from the brush of a Titian. The warm afternoon light was shining obliquely upon it, and here and there a glint of gold flickered in her hair as she moved. Sir Francis seated himself by her side. Behind them the quiet sea heaved and rippled against the vessel's side; in front of them and all around them, bronzes, and scimitars, cashmeres and Japanese arms, carved ivory and tiger-skins, curios and relics innumerable, speaking to the imagination of the vastness and variety of the world's products, and of the widely differing standards of art, beauty, morals, wrong and right, that our fellow-creatures possess, were scattered in splendid and picturesque profusion.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE THIN END OF THE WEDGE.

"It is the secret sympathy,  
The silver link, the silken tie,  
Which heart to heart and mind to mind  
In body and in soul can bind."

THERE is a French proverb, which, like all other proverbs, is too absolute in its statement, but which possesses, nevertheless, a large substratum of truth. This proverb declares that "*Chateau qui parle, et femme qui écoute*," are both on the point of surrendering. However this may be, it is certain that Sir Francis did not lose sight of the enormous advantage he had acquired in gaining Pauline's ear. But he followed up the advantage with such elaborate precautions, his manner was so gentle, and so profoundly respectful, that her misgivings and her trepidation slowly melted away. Everything around her seemed to soothe and lull her senses. The soft air, the low impassioned tones that vibrated upon her ear, and the rippling splash of the gentle waves without. The surroundings, too, spoke of a different kind of world from her own. Certainly the row of Fijian skulls was not a reassuring spectacle. They seemed to grin with their fleshless jaws as though they had been mocking at the tardy process of love-making—so different from that of their own experience—that they were forced to witness. But the scimitars and tiger-skins, the Japanese masks and Oriental stuffs, formed a background of enervating influence. Even the odour of sandalwood, that mingled with the balmy atmosphere wafted in through the open port, was subtly narcotic in its influence.

As Sir Francis continued to speak, Pauline continued to listen. Could it be a crime, she asked herself, to hear what he had to say—especially as this was the prelude to an eternal farewell? Of course, after such a scene,



they must never, never meet again. But what a solace it would be to her, in the long, stagnant, dreary future that loomed before her, to recall this moment! Surely she might listen, for the first and last time, to the one and only voice that had the power to evoke such a strange unaccustomed thrill of sympathy in her whole being. The "might have been" had sometimes shaped itself vaguely to her imagination like a bright nebulous vision of glory. Now she would be able to give it substance, and to ponder over it in a definite form, and life would be fuller and richer than ever before.

So much for Pauline's mental attitude. As for Sir Francis, it was only by a strong effort of will that he forced himself to speak calmly and deliberately, and to abstain from yielding to the stormy impulse that bid him clasp his listener to his heart. To older women than Pauline his reasoning might not have sounded entirely convincing. The simple answer that a promise given and a duty undertaken have to be fulfilled *at all costs*, would have shaken it to its very foundations. But to our inexperienced heroine, nourished upon Fourierism, and regardless of the pitfall at her feet, while gazing at the stars overhead, specious arguments seemed almost to convey the doctrines of a new Gospel. She heard now, for the first time, that the purest, holiest instinct was that of spontaneous love. Hitherto she had been filled with a burning shame for having tacitly admitted that she had succumbed to its sway. In all the books she had ever read, it was only after a long time, years and years of conflict, and misery, and remorse, that the heroine had allowed even a hint of her sentiment to penetrate the mask that her dignity and her duty forced her to wear. And here, at the end of a three days' acquaintanceship, she had betrayed herself. Even her friend must think lightly of her now. Incoherently and distressfully Pauline essayed to explain her feeling in this respect. But Sir Francis seemed to understand her before she had time even to formulate her thought.

"Think lightly of you, my darling!" he whispered vehemently; "how little you know what I really venerate! Why, if you were not the most transparently natural, truthful, unartificial creature upon God's earth, and therefore the most *pure*—yes, I say it from my soul, the most *pure*—you would not have betrayed yourself. It



is because you *are* so truthful that you can't help yourself. That is one of the reasons why I love and worship you so completely. Some women would have made a merit of posing for three weeks, or three months, or three years—what does it matter? But you are truth itself."

"No, no," she interrupted him, in great distress. "I can't bear to hear you praise me in that way. All my thoughts are confused just now; but if I am truthful to you, I am being awfully untruthful to George."

"Of course you are untruthful to him, and to yourself too, as long as you live with him," he answered shortly. "I had not been five minutes with you before I saw that your marriage was a most ghastly blunder. What made you do it? How was it brought about? Did they *force* you into it?"

"No, nobody *forced* me," said Pauline; "but I *had* to do it." Then seeing his bewildered expression, she continued hurriedly, "It was at that picnic, you remember?—*you* were to have gone to it, and you didn't. Chubby was sitting in the buggy all alone, and the horse took fright, and was going to dash over the cliff, and Chubby would have been killed under my eyes," she could not control a shiver as she said these words, "only George saved him. He saved him at the risk of his own life (everybody said so); he broke his collar-bone in doing it, and he fainted from the pain; and then, when he asked me again to marry him, I promised him I would. Grand'mère tried all she could to prevent it, but I could not take back my word, could I?"

"You might have asked him to give it you back!"

"Oh, but he wouldn't!" exclaimed Pauline naïvely. "He cared about me too much, you know."

"Cared about you!" echoed her companion grimly. "He knew he had made a good bargain, and he was determined to hold you to it. Good God! What a horrible sacrifice! Don't you see what an unfair advantage he took of you? It didn't matter to *him* whether he wrecked your whole life, so long as he got hold of you for himself. But it is just what one might have expected of him"——

"You mustn't say any harm of George," interrupted Pauline shortly, while a warm flush rose to her cheeks. "You don't know him, or his character either, the very least bit in the world."



"I've seen quite enough to form my own opinion, thanks," said Francis drily. "A man must be utterly devoid of the least spark of chivalry to force a woman into a distasteful marriage on the strength of a promise wrenched from her in an instant of mistaken enthusiasm. But didn't you feel what an insane thing you were doing? What a wildly Quixotic action it was!"

Pauline was silent. The drowsy lapping of the waves without was the only sound that fell upon her questioner's ear. Truth to tell, her memory was rising against her like an accusing ghost, as the vision of the past surged up and confronted her. Yes! she *had* felt misgivings, though she had argued them down and battled them down. She had felt them constantly. Up to the fatal morning of her marriage, a hidden voice had whispered to her persistently that her intended self-sacrifice was a *fault*, besides being a grievous mistake. It had told her that she was acting disloyally towards her future husband as well as towards herself—that she was outraging the holiest and the purest of woman's instincts. She had been more than half aware that she was doing wrong at the time, and now her conscience reproached her with it loudly. Her motives had not been all as praiseworthy as she had imagined them. There had been an unacknowledged grain of obstinacy—a large measure of the unreasoning determination of a martyr in her mood. And now came the bitter reflection that she had been her own undoing. She had forged her chain with her own hands, and she must drag it wearily along to the end of her journey. She had gone but a little way, it was true, yet already she was groaning under the load. Worst of all, she had betrayed the secret which honour demanded that she should carry with her to the grave. In her present frame of mind she hardly knew whether the betrayal was a relief, or only an additional burden she had added to the other one. Doubt and remorse, and shame and perplexity and hope, were all written in her face as she cast a timid glance towards her friend.

"George will be wondering where I am," she said; then added in a low hurried voice, "You were speaking of chivalry just now—I think I know what it means. If you care for me in that kind of way—even though I should never see you again—it would make all my life seem different. And life *does* seem so hard and



difficult to understand—so does everything! But I want to do right—what is *considered* right, I mean; and if I have your friendship, and can go on believing in you always, it would make everything so wonderfully much happier. I should not feel weighed down by a secret like that. Oh! I hope you know what I mean, and that you understand. You *do*—don't you?"

She was looking at him with eyes that pleaded even more passionately than her words. The old, old dream of

" Love—such love as spirits feel  
In worlds whose course is equable and pure"—

was inspiring her imagination.

It was a curious expression she encountered in Francis's eyes as he returned her look. The appeal had touched him in a sensitive point, and for the moment he could almost have found it in his heart to swear that he would be as Launcelot and Sir Galahad in one. As the former, in respect of the strength and endurance of his passion; as the latter in respect of the whiteness and purity of it. That he would watch over his lady from a distance, nor ask for other guerdon than the knowledge that his devotion was a solace and a support to her.

In obedience to that transient impulse, he took Pauline's hand in his own and lifted it to his lips. "My dear," he said, in a tone of the deepest tenderness, "I will do in all things exactly as you wish. You are my *fate*, Pauline. It is curious, isn't it? I seem to have had a presentiment of it the instant I saw you the other day. When you know me better, you will see that I am not one to give my heart away lightly. I suppose I must have belonged to you from all time, though now that I have found you I cannot claim you."

"It is no use to think of that," said Pauline, withdrawing her trembling hand from his grasp. "I want to be able to think of you as my dearest friend, and to be able to write to you, and all: but oh, *please*, for pity's sake, don't stay any longer in Melbourne now! I can't reason against you, and I do care about you. Surely that is good reason enough for going away. If you only knew how the thought of your staying *terrifies* me! Indeed, indeed it does. You say I am truthful,



and this is the very truth. I want you to go. I beg you with all my heart and soul to go."

There was no mistaking the passionate earnestness of her voice. Emotion choked her utterance. Her hands were twisted together as though the sincerity of her petition had evoked the unconscious gesture of prayer. Sir Francis stroked his moustache, as was his invariable habit in moments of perplexity, and then replied, in a voice pitched to the softest and most persuasive of tones—

"Poor child, you still have to learn what it is to be *really* loved. Have I not promised you that I would do just what you wish? I will go away to-night if you want me to, though you mustn't mind my saying it is a very bad compliment you are paying both to yourself and to me. But can't you muster the courage to hear me quietly for an instant first? I *ought* to stay a week or two longer in Melbourne" ("and the letters from home," thought Pauline, but she did not interrupt him); "but I promise you I will not breathe a word about my love for you—unless you *tell* me that I may. I will only see you formally, and in the presence of others. Surely you cannot want to take away that little happiness from me, just to be in the same room with you sometimes—to have you turn your face towards me when you are at the theatre or the races—it is not asking for much, is it? and the sternest moralist—I won't tell you now what I think of the conventional code of morality, for it would frighten you away from me again—but the sternest moralist could not see any harm in that. You must accustom yourself to look upon me as a friend you can *trust*. And the first time I break the condition I have laid upon myself, you shall send me away without mercy, I promise you. Will that do; and will you give me your hand upon it?"

He rose from his seat, and approached her with his right hand extended.

"You make me believe you, in spite of myself," said Pauline, unconsciously paraphrasing the words of a Pagan emperor, but she smiled as she surrendered her hand to his grasp. The vision of a love beyond words that would fling its radiance over her path henceforth presented itself to her imagination—could any dream be



sweeter? It would change the whole tenour of existence. It was the ideal realised. How easy it would be to give her entire devotion in action to George and to duty, while she might nurse in her inmost heart a pure and satisfying sentiment for another! And in such a solace as this there could be no sin. The feeling had come to her of itself, unsought and unbidden. It was there, and all the self-upbraiding in the world could not drive it away. But it could be forced to follow the direction she would give it—the direction, that was to say, of a loyal and elevating friendship. Had not her friend told her she could *trust* him; and did not that imply a full understanding of all she felt? What stronger reassurance could she require than the promise he had just made her of his own free will?

As though to give her time to recover from her agitation, Sir Francis turned away and walked towards the opposite end of the cabin. Pauline saw him select a tiny key from among the few *breloques* that hung upon his watch chain, and open therewith a miniature cabinet in old Japanese lacquer work, securely fastened against the wall. The cabinet open, he touched a hidden spring, a minute panel slid aside, and disclosed a very tiny box, which he drew from its hiding-place and carried back to her carefully.

“Is that the explanation of the dark mystery Mr. Travers hinted at, I wonder?” thought Pauline half mockingly; but she fixed her eyes at the same time upon the box with a full measure of feminine curiosity as to its contents.

Sir Francis said nothing, but opened it slowly, and drew therefrom a curiously carved and graven ring. It was in the form of two twisted serpents, bearing between their wide-opened jaws a stone that might have been a great diamond or only a piece of glittering rock crystal; Pauline could not divine which. The peculiarity of the ring consisted in the fact that in the heart of this gem or stone there lay a small dull globule of the hue of tarnished gold.

“What does it mean?” she asked.

“It means speedy and almost painless death,” he answered softly. “You must know that once on a time I was given to making chemical experiments, and I met



at Heidelberg a German chemist who helped me to carry out an idea I had long had. You see that miniature globe of gold; there lies inside it, hermetically sealed, a drop of poison so deadly, that the person who should breathe it between his lips would drop dead very few seconds after. To get at it, one only has to press a tiny lever with one's finger-nail, to be found—but that is a secret only known to myself. The difficulty was to distil the poison, and get the globule confined within the ring before it evaporated—for it is as subtle as it is deadly. It was only by means of a chance discovery of my German chemist's that we succeeded, after a thousand fruitless attempts. I believe this is the only ring of the kind in the world, and I doubt whether a similar one could be produced."

"And what are those letters in Hebrew or Greek—I don't know which—carved on the inside?"

"That is a Greek word—*Euthanasia*—sudden death. Have you a desire to raise the ring to your lips? I would not let you handle it if there were any danger. A child might suck it all day without the least risk. I generally wear it on my finger, though the objection to it is that it attracts attention. But it might be worn with safety by anybody. I am the only person, you see, who knows the secret it contains and how to get at it. It is like the masonic sign, or the cave in Ali Baba. It has no meaning excepting for the initiated."

"And why did you want it?" asked Pauline gravely.

"Why did I want it?" he repeated, smiling a strange smile. "How solemnly you say that! A whim! nothing more. I have my own interpretation of life, you know."

"I wish *I* had such a possession," she said, with a profound sigh, at the end of a long pause. "I should feel so *safe*."

He drew it from the finger upon which he had placed it, and dropped it into her lap. "It is yours when you will," he said, "but the secret is not yours. And the secret shall never be yours unless there should come a time ripe for giving it to you. You will ask me for it some day, perhaps—upon certain conditions—and I will not withhold it from you. But till then it would not be right to tell it to you."

"The ring is of no use without it," said Pauline, handing it back to him. "Keep it until I ask for it and the



secret together." She tried to speak as though she were jesting, but vainly. "Tell me, is it only good for one *go*?" she continued with mock seriousness; "or would it kill two people at a time?"

"It would kill them both together if their lips were joined over it. That would be expiring in a kiss with a vengeance, wouldn't it? But it could not be transferred from one person to another, it evaporates so rapidly."

At this instant George's voice, interrupted by more than one hearty peal of laughter, was heard in the saloon. He had come down from deck with Mr. Travers, linking his arm within that of the young man, and exploding in boisterous mirth at his dry conceits.

George was apt to make fast and furious friendships upon the very speediest notice. His sympathies would bubble up like champagne froth, and vanish almost as quickly when the object of them was removed.

As Pauline came out hurriedly to meet him, he greeted her with a jubilant though somewhat incoherent account of an awful lark they had just been having in the fo'castle. It concerned a Kanaka, whom they had bribed to let them drop a tame lizard down his back, while he tackled at the same time a prickly porcupine that was "a caution to snakes." Pauline listened to her husband's voice with a curious sensation of having been called back from some long journey that she had just been making to an unknown region in infinite space. More uncomfortable and unaccountable still was the strange sensation that oppressed her of Mr. Travers's knowing, as well as though he had been in the place of the Fijian skulls themselves, the exact nature of the scene that had just passed between herself and the "skipper." It almost seemed to her as though everything she had said and thought must be written in her face, and she could hardly understand how her friend's manner could remain so entirely cool and calm and natural.

Sir Francis now led George into the cabin containing the skulls, and answered all the hundred and one questions that they suggested. Perceiving the almost covetous glance that his guest directed towards a miniature skull from Japan, carved with marvellously realistic accuracy in ivory, he begged him to accept it, and asked permission to present Mrs. Drafton with a



trifling memento of her visit at the same time. Neither George nor Pauline were in the least aware of the value of the gift—a little bunch of feather flowers from Brazil, though the work that had produced them seemed something little short of miraculous upon closer inspection.

As the day wore on, afternoon tea was served beneath an awning upon deck. Pauline lay back in a deck chair with something of a lotus-eater's sensations. The air was so soft and bright, it seemed to caress her cheeks like a veil of silk. The distant vessels were mirrored in the quiet sea, making a double picture of masts and bulwarks. The secret she had shared with her friend—not the secret of the ring, but the secret of their mutual attachment—lay warm at the heart. The wrong or right of it was not to be thought of just now. When she was reminded of it by a certain expression in his eyes, that came into them only when he looked at her, she felt her heart beat responsively and exultantly. She said little, being quite content with her own share of happiness. Sir Francis, on the other hand, talked a good deal. He talked of things that were most interesting to George, and seemed, to her surprise, to hit upon many meeting-points with him. George had all the instincts of a hunter, and, to Pauline's astonishment, it appeared that he was well up in colonial history and politics as well. She had never heard him give so much information, or emit such shrewd opinions about land-laws, miners' rights, duties upon imported stock, and selections. Her respect for him rose as she listened; and in obedience to her strong natural prompting always to go to the heart of things, she found herself comparing her own knowledge with her husband's, and asking herself whether that of the latter would not be of more use in the world than her own ill-assorted and unpractical store of it.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *HOW THE RIFT IS TO BE WIDENED.*

"And oftentimes excusing of a fault,  
Doth make the fault the worse by the excuse."

LONG after Pauline had left the yacht, its owner continued to walk up and down the deck in the starlight, ruminating deeply. The men were accustomed to see him take this post-prandial exercise in the evening, his cigar between his lips and a large St. Bernard dog at his heels. When the night was oppressively warm, young Travers would creep up from below, clad in an airy suit of clinging pyjamas that gave him the air of a lithe amateur harlequin, and saunter by the skipper's side. But this evening he had an instinctive feeling that the skipper desired to be left to himself. The dull red spark at the end of the cigar, glowing like a miniature beacon light, might be seen monotonously travelling backwards and forwards through the darkness, until even the St. Bernard's patience was tired out. The Indian attendant, stretched full-length in a hidden corner of the deck, had fallen into a profound sleep, from which, nevertheless, he was prepared to wake at the first sign that his master needed his services. The tuneful voices from the fo'castle, that had been sounding the chorus of—

"my own true love—  
She's doing the grand, in a distant land,  
Ten thousand miles away,"

were gradually hushed. A profound peace fell upon the *Aurora*. The silently shining stars overhead, and the upward shoot of the balls of phosphorescent light through the dark waters, illumined her above and below; and in the midst of the star-spangled obscurity Sir Francis Segrave continued to pace slowly up and down the solitary deck wrapped in deep thought.

The truth is that he was approaching a crisis in his life, and he knew it. It behoved him now to consider



how he would meet it. An all-mastering desire had taken possession of him, and it threatened to overwhelm him completely. He wanted Pauline Drafton for his own; to such an extent, indeed, that life without her hardly seemed worth the having. That is a very true saying which informs us that it is only the possible we hanker after. Few people fret their lives out because they are not kings or queens. If Sir Francis had seen George Drafton's wife safely anchored in her husband's affections, he might have admired her—he might even have regretted his lost opportunities deeply—but the thought of deliberately setting himself to undermine her tranquil wedded love would not have occurred to him. He would have looked, and longed, and gone his way.

But it had not taken him long to discover that Pauline's anchorage was a very insecure one, and this discovery it was that seemed to change the entire aspect of the case. How far poor erring humanity is justified in playing the *rôle* of Providence (like the Archduke in the "Mysteries of Paris"), in projecting dark deeds as the forerunners of angelic ones, and committing evil actions that good may come out of them, he did not stop to consider. To what extent the end justifies the means is, in point of fact, a question about which much remains to be said. But Sir Francis had not the inclination to argue this out with himself in the abstract, and simply set to work to consider whether the end he had in view was a justifiable one or not. The means might be taken into account later.

The more he pondered, the more he was inclined to conclude that his object might be defended—even upon ethical grounds. He did not want Pauline for the satisfaction of a sultanesque caprice—if such a word is permissible. He wanted her in order that she might share his life and love to the very end of their united days.

He wanted her for *her* sake as well as for his own. She had let him see right into her heart, and he was convinced that he could make her happy. He wanted to take her entirely away from her present associations, and make her his wedded wife. The drawback was that this desire could only be realised at the cost of much peril, much scandal, and much suffering. There



would be a terrible path—a real *mauvais pas*—to follow for a while. In the first place, he would have to attach himself to George, and increase the latent propensities of the unfortunate young man to drink and gamble until Pauline should learn to loathe her husband's presence. This Drafton was a weak-natured fellow. He could easily be worked upon to go to excesses, and be sent home drunk to his wife as often as occasion required.

This first step towards the accomplishment of his purpose was not a pleasant one, and Sir Francis told himself that he would rather perform it by proxy. But the consequence of it might be reckoned upon with certainty. Pauline would be inevitably driven to seek sympathy and protection at her friend's hands, and afterwards the rest would be easy. There would not be any difficulty in making her leave Australia with him in the yacht. He would cruise about with her out of reach of danger until George, prompted thereto by the suggestions of a somewhat out-at-elbows sporting lawyer of his acquaintance, who must be adroitly and heavily bribed for the purpose, should ask for and obtain a divorce. That could not be a matter of many months' delay, and, the divorce obtained, Sir Francis would marry Pauline in due form and take her where she would soon forget all about her early career. Then he would bring her home to England, and place her in the position for which she was so well fitted. He had an ample fortune, and now only he would really enjoy it—with the one woman in the world for him by his side.

Here then was his object, and here were the means of obtaining it. Now as to his justification, for walking up and down, with only the eternal verities in the shape of the stars to behold his reverie, he felt he might question his own soul in perfect freedom. The justification was not perhaps as easy to find upon a first examination as he had believed. George's right of possession was the strong point against it. In vain the would-be self-justifier went over the scene of the afternoon—telling himself for the hundredth time that Pauline's marriage was *no* marriage, that she had been dealt with unfairly, that her actual position was quite unsafe and uncertain, and would probably end in some dire catastrophe if he abstained from meddling with



it for his own part; that the step he contemplated would be her salvation if it ended successfully—in vain he tried to persuade himself that even for George's own sake a violent rupture would be a better and safer solution than any other, and that a nature like his would very soon outlive a short and painful episode, for which it was clearly responsible, in the first instance, since it had allowed him to force a woman to marry him without regard for her future happiness. In vain he urged that Pauline's present existence with a man towards whom she felt as she must feel towards George Drafton—whether that man should bear the name of husband or not—was wrong, unrighteous, and dangerous, and that her union with himself, who loved her, and whom she was ready to love in return, would be the only true and pure union possible. He was aware all the time of the existence of an unsatisfactory and disconcerting counter-plea far down in the depths of his conscience. "What right have you to meddle with another man's good?" it said. "George Drafton loves his wife. No matter how he won her, she is his now. In God's name leave him to keep her if he can. You say he will get over it if you drag her away from him. But how do you know whether you will not wreck his life for ever; and though that may not count for much in your eyes, how can you answer for the effect of your work upon the woman you love? Supposing you only succeed in giving her a lifelong remorse? She is not without a certain kind of sentiment for her husband, though you are going to do your best to destroy it by abasing him to the uttermost in her eyes. But have a care! Between trying to work the moral destruction of the man who stands in your path, and murdering him outright, there is not much to choose. Have a care, and count the cost. For, though all should turn out exactly as you intend, and Pauline should come to you apparently of her own free will—nay, even if you should be able to marry her later, and *right* her in the eyes of the world, there *is* such a thing as retribution. Not the retribution inflicted by an offended Deity—who has no existence for you—but the retribution that follows wrongdoing, by taking away all flavour from the thing we have hungered after as soon as it is in our possession."

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"I will take my chance for that," replied Sir Francis to this importunate advocate; "the retributive argument has no terrors for me. Besides, there is Pauline herself to be considered. Why should her whole life be sacrificed because of a mistake for which she is hardly responsible? Why am I to consider her husband and not herself? If I *can* save her I will. It is not as though I had not counted the cost. It shall be for her to decide. If she loves me, and will come to me, I will sacrifice everything in life to attain the end of making her happy. She will not feel much remorse, I reckon, if she learns, as is most probable, that her present husband has married a barmaid the month after he has divorced her. And because this George Drafton is in actual possession, because he has taken a mean advantage of the enthusiasm of an innocent girl, I am to fold my hands and go away, with the knowledge that at the cost of a little risk and trouble I might be united for ever to the only woman I shall ever love, and what is more maddening still, to a woman who possesses all the treasures of a first love, sharpened by unsatisfying experience, to bestow upon me in return. And I am to think of her from henceforth, eating her heart out by the side of that uncomprehending clod, until she commits some folly, or turns *fast*, or goes religious mad, or some horror of the kind ensues. I am to accept all this, I say, for no better reason than the one that she is *Mrs.* Drafton. It is monstrous! As for working the fellow's ruin, it is easy to stop short of that. A couple of weeks here or there make but little difference in a lifetime, and a few more scenes like the one which followed his celebration of the Melbourne Cup will soon do my business."

It is popularly supposed that before thoughts can become coherent they must shape themselves in the brain in the form of unspoken words. I cannot answer for it that any one of the words above transcribed took conscious shape in Sir Francis Segrave's mind, but the tenour of his communing with himself ran to the phrases I have set down. The counter-advocate was silenced for the nonce, and so effectually that Sir Francis bethought himself of going below and "turning in," after he had thrown his last half-consumed cigar into the sea. The "slave of the lamp" slept on un-



disturbed, for his master crept down alone and noiselessly, though, notwithstanding the satisfying solution he had arrived at, he did not betake himself at once to his berth in quest of that sleep of the just which he had supposed himself so ready to appreciate. An Algerian lantern, suspended from the ceiling, threw its green and red rays with a subdued glow over the strange medley of objects that surrounded him. The spear points glinted capriciously, the gleaming skulls seemed almost to grin at him of their own intention. He threw himself down upon the divan on which Pauline had been seated, and conjured up the vision of her charming form as he had seen it a few hours ago. The whole place seemed full of her impalpable presence, and as he recalled all that had passed as the vision of her face looking out at him from the gloom of the waggonette a few days back returned to him, a wild idea came into his mind. An idea of bringing her down alone to the yacht, where everything should be in readiness for an immediate departure. While the sailors were heaving the anchor to their old chorus of "For we say so, and we hope so," he would unfold his plan to her and surprise her into consent. Then when once he had sailed away with her, away to the

"summer isles of Eden,  
Lying in dark purple spheres of sea,"

she would be his for ever.

It was an entrancing, intoxicating idea to contemplate, having her all to himself, with the wide ocean around them. He would arrange her a boudoir fit for the bride of a pirate prince—if princes are to be found among pirates—and her wardrobe should be worthy of a Fatima. She should choose where they would go and what they would see, and he would have her so honoured and worshipped and waited upon wherever they went, that she would altogether forget the existence of a conventional code of morals and a scowling Mrs. Grundy. Australia, he reflected, though it made such a large spot on the chart, was, after all, an unconsidered, unimportant, out-of-the-way corner of the world, inhabited by a mere handful of people, whose opinions could carry no weight beyond their own little circle. Among his own acquaintances in England no one knew or cared about Australia a straw;



and by keeping his yacht in the South Seas or about the South American coast until matters were settled, he would answer for it that not a soul would be wiser for their adventures when he and Pauline should make their appearance at home as lawful man and wife. A story of Wilkie Collins's, in which two of the characters, apparently united in wedlock, lead a long, calm, and unquestioned existence of many years together, until they are killed in a railway accident on their return from a tardy marriage ceremony, occurred to him as a reassuring recollection.

The obstacle of orthodoxy, which might have been a very serious one, had, too, no existence in Pauline's case. No, all things considered, the plan of carrying her off was a possible and feasible one. It required for its success only boldness, constancy, and a firm determination not to be beaten. And the prize was worth the struggle. No good things were ever obtained without fighting for them.

At this point in his reflections Sir Francis looked at his watch. It was between two and three in the morning—a time at which projects that look impracticable in the daylight seem comparatively easy of accomplishment. Then he took from his finger the serpent-ring that he had worn there since he had shown it to Pauline, and turned it slowly round and round. The light from the Algerian lantern fell upon the poisoned gem, making it burn like a miniature star. Sir Francis seemed to have a fascination for examining it closely to-night. He held it up to the light, as though to make quite sure that the globule wore its normal aspect, and only dropped the ring reluctantly and finally in its hiding-place after bestowing upon it a long and minute scrutiny.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### HOW THE WEDGE WAS DRIVEN IN.

"My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain."

—SHAKSPERE.

IF, under the influence of his wife's agnosticism. George's early faith in "Old Nick and his pitchfork" had undergone a weakening process, the course of events during the next few weeks was calculated to revive it with redoubled force. His faith in Old Nick without the pitchfork, that is to say; for, to use his own expression, George seemed to have the "devil's own luck." Everything he ventured (and most of his transactions now were ventures) seemed to succeed. He backed the right horses. He held innumerable sequences at loo. He turned up the king at *écarté* with astonishing frequency. He lived in a fever of excitement; rushing off to races, pigeon-shootings, cricket-matches, billiard-tournaments—wherever indeed he could put something on in the day-time—and sitting out his companions at the card-table every night. Pauline, who seemed to be prone during this epoch to fall into long self-concentrated reveries, would occasionally arouse herself to address a few words of serious expostulation to her husband.

But George's rejoinder was invariably the same.

"Don't fluff, old woman! and for the Lord's sake don't preach, or you'll turn the luck against me. I'm in form, by Jove, and you ought to encourage me to go in and win. That Segrave's a jolly good fellow, I can tell you, and knows how to lose like a Briton. 'Pon my word, I'm almost ashamed of the luck I have sometimes. That's all stuff about being lucky with cards and unlucky in love. *I've* been lucky in love, for I've got *you*; and as for the cards—Lord! you should see the hands I get. I'm the wonder of the place—I am!"



And if he had a moment to spare, George would demonstrate the fact by making Pauline hold in her hand a certain number of cards out of an ever-ready pack he would produce. Thereupon he would arrange the cards of an imaginary Brown, Jones, and Robinson, and proceed to show by what an extraordinary chance, coupled, of course, with good play, his own hand had enabled him to take all the tricks from the said Brown, Jones, and Robinson, and finally to sweep an imaginary pool of ninety sovereigns into his pocket.

Pauline would go through this little comedy in the hope of making him listen to reason afterwards. But a curious inability to fix his thoughts upon anything but his present luck seemed to have overtaken George. Once only he asked his wife if she were dull.

She answered, "No," with a somewhat unsatisfactory smile.

To be sure she was "Death on books," George reflected; but he quite intended she should "have a good time of it" before his luck turned. Sometimes he would take her to the theatre, sitting out the play with a wild impatience to have the curtain fall finally, that he might be able to betake himself to the card-table. On more than one occasion, when Sir Francis Segrave had happened to look into the box where husband and wife were seated, George had rushed off for a game of billiards, leaving Pauline under her friend's protection. A feverish restlessness seemed to have taken possession of him. To fix his attention even upon a sensational drama was an effort that fatigued his brain. Often he answered at random. He was not given to analysing his own sensations, but there were moments when it flashed across his mind that he must be "going the pace a little too fast—he felt so dashed queer." Yet at the card-table all his clearness of comprehension returned, and he gave proof of a lucidity and a clairvoyance that rendered him, as he had said himself, the wonder of the place.

Pauline meanwhile was letting herself drift with the current. There was no longer any mention now of Sir Francis's departure. When he came into her box at the theatre she would turn her head with a smile of recognition in her eyes, and then fix her attention again upon the play. She had known he was coming, and



only now that he was there the acting would have its full meaning for her. It was so with everything. A passage in a book, a chance effect in a sunset sky, Chubby's latest departure in orthography—all these, like everything else that moved her, must be imparted to her friend before they seemed to yield their full flavour. At the theatre, when the play was going on, a glance exchanged with him, at a funny or pathetic or even badly-rendered phrase, did duty for a whole conversation.

If George had not been entirely wrapped up in a web of his own weaving, through which he seemed to be able to discern nothing save winning horses and winning cards, he could not have failed to perceive the change that had come over his wife. Not, perhaps, as regarded himself, for he had almost come to accept the position of giving more than he received, but as regarded her general manner and tone of thought. She seemed to have a new zest for things. She would array herself to go and see a cricket or football match, upon a hot-wind afternoon, with as much alacrity and joyousness as though "innings" and "scores" had not been as Greek and Latin to her. Her eyes would sparkle as she fastened the invariable bunch of rosebuds against her neck. Somehow she seemed always to be environed by flowers in these days. There were no longer any signs either of the listlessness that had marked her bearing at Rubria, when she used to sit watching the burning logs in the winter time, or loitered upon the verandah on a summer evening. True, her eyes had betimes an absent look, and more than once she did not seem to hear when he addressed her, or she answered with a start, as though her thoughts had been far away. But the nature of her reveries had evidently undergone a change.

But, as I have said, these signs of the times were unheeded by George. To connect the rosebuds, the day-dreams, or the new interest in cricket and football, with Sir Francis Segrave, was an idea the less likely to occur to him that the friendship of the latter seemed to be bestowed in such a great measure upon himself. Hardly a day passed in which the two men were not together; and when they were about to separate, after an inspection of horses at Kirk's, or a game of billiards



at the Athenæum, one or the other would be sure to remember that So-and-so was to have his revenge the same evening, and an appointment would be made that had the invariable effect of keeping George out for the greater part of the night. At first Pauline accepted this order of things quietly. As ignorant of the ways of a husband as any convent-bred *ingénue*, she was prepared to believe that it was part of the usual matrimonial arrangement for the wife to remain alone with her books and work, while the husband saw his friends at the club, and enjoyed a man's pastimes in their society. Besides, she had her thoughts for company.

Every day brought some new kind of experience that left a stimulating recollection behind it. It might be only a word, a look, a lingering pressure of the hand. It was enough to make her feel that she was all in all to her friend, who had so nobly adopted the rôle of her guardian spirit.

But even the impalpable presence of this devoted friend did not suffice, at the end of a certain time, to quiet the misgivings she was gradually beginning to feel. It was not only that George spent all his nights at the card-table. There were times when he returned to her quite unlike himself. His words would run into each other, and he would stumble about the bed-chamber, and utter exclamations that made her blood run cold. The most of the time she did not understand what he was saying, but it did not require a glossary to tell her that the incoherent expressions he used were of a nature to defile her ears. At first she would shiver and cry, feeling a forlorn impulse to run out upon the landing in her night-dress, to get away from his terrifying presence. Even the sound of her distressed voice, that had never failed hitherto to bring him to her side with words of tender reassurance, seemed to have no effect upon him at these times. The dread of seeing him return in this condition was becoming a nightmare to Pauline. The reading of "*Renée de Mauperin*," or such other books as her friend chose for her, even the keen interest of lingering over the marked passages, and guessing at the thoughts that had prompted them, was powerless to help her. She was beginning to dread her nights like



any child who is frightened of the dark. Those interminable hours during which she would lie wide awake listening to every sound. The dreary intervals between one and two, between two and three, only broken at the hour and half-hour by the spasmodic strokes of the asthmatic clock in the adjoining room.

The tension of nerves that would precede George's return, and the agonised moments of suspense that must elapse before she could determine in what mood he had come. She had learned to distinguish between his moods now. Sometimes he was incoherently elated, at other times he would be stupidly depressed. Most awful of all, he would sometimes be violent and abusive, kicking over the objects in his way, and swearing at the wife whom he adored when he heard her reproachful exclamation of "Oh, George, do you know what time it is?" as he entered the room.

How would it end? Who would help her? Every morning, when George had returned to his right mind, he would make her a solemn promise that he would give up that cursed gambling, which was killing him, and go back to the station. If she had insisted upon his doing so instantly, packing their portmanteaux resolutely, and keeping her husband in sight until the moment of departure had arrived, there is no doubt that in twenty-four hours' time they would have been out of reach of all further danger at Rubria. But was it not going from Scylla to Charybdis, or to use a more homely simile, out of the frying-pan into the fire? Though she resolved every night that she would make George come home on the morrow, when the morrow came she found herself wavering and irresolute. The nights in Melbourne were very terrible, both for him and for her; but there was large compensation in the day. And both day and night at Rubria there was dreary, unending monotony. Only to think of the dragged-out, burning days in the midst of the shadeless wastes, with the little homestead heated through and through like an oven, and the flies and mosquitoes devouring the inmates alive—with George lounging about without an aim or occupation of any kind, killing time by dozing, and whistling, and teasing the dogs, or alternating the pastime of spooning with his wife with that of yawning with the McCloskys—what could be more wearisome than this? There was danger in



remaining in town. Nay—worse than danger. There was conscious sin, and there was mental suffering besides. But at least there was excitement. There was sensation. There was interest in life. At Rubria there was stagnation—deadly, unendurable stagnation. Here she was walking upon the brink of a precipice, but there were rich blooms to be gathered on the way. There she would be upon a safe path, but upon a path so arid that she shrank from following it. Yet things could not go on upon their present footing for long, though she was becoming afraid somehow to look forward.

No! things could not go on so for long. There was a way out of the trouble, though it was a way that even to think about would have seemed a crime a few short months ago. But she had changed now! George would never be able to call her a “sucking-dove” again. She had thoughts that *he* would not have dared to harbour. It was doubtful, she reflected within herself, whether he would even have understood them. She had learned that wrong and right were only relative terms, and that human beings endowed with brains did not really accept the old-fashioned interpretation of them. She had learned that the system by which marriages are rendered binding, was a hideous mistake, and that the only pure and holy union is the one sanctified and maintained by mutual inclination and passion. She had learned, besides, the views and conduct of all the lights of the world who had defied the marriage laws. In fact, under the influence of the books she read and the views she heard, Pauline’s mind was gradually beginning to expand in a direction George had never contemplated.

At its present rate of progress, Sir Francis calculated that his time of probation would last even a shorter time than he had been prepared to endure. He admitted that George played into his hands admirably. It was not very hard to lead the young man on, step by step, along the downward path. Already George was beginning to look what he himself called “played out,” and before long the influence of stale smoke, strong spirits, and a half-distracted brain, would render him a companion from whom a refined woman might well shrink. Sir Francis had unbounded faith in the influence of physical repulsion. Only let him succeed



in introducing *that* factor into his computations, and he was safe. This lack of spiritual sympathy between Pauline and her husband—there was no denying it—was a very strong point. But a little personal antipathy would go farther even than this.

There was another force to which Sir Francis Segrave also looked, and did not look in vain. It was the force of Pauline's own sentiment for himself, that he sought by every means in his power to strengthen in her heart. As far as mere phrases went, he had been as good as his word. There had been no love passages between himself and George Drafton's wife from the time that he had told her on the yacht that she was all in all to him. But the thousand several tongues which love as well as conscience possesses repeated to her during every hour of the day that her friend lived for *her* and her alone. There were volumes of unspoken tenderness in his every tone and look. His eyes would question her to discover how she looked and felt with an anxiety and eagerness more eloquent than any words. And then, as Pauline reminded herself constantly, what a chivalrous, heroic devotion it was that led this man for *her* sake to follow her husband into the hateful atmosphere of the card-room, night after night, in the vain effort to rescue him from himself and send him home to her in his right mind. She could not render him responsible for the failure of his generous endeavours; for George seemed somehow to have gone quite beyond bounds. As to suspecting for an instant that the weaker nature of her husband was yielding to the relentless purpose of the stronger, that was a notion that could not by any possibility have entered Mrs. Drafton's brain. Francis—for so she thought of him now—was her *friend*. It was not a devil's part, but the part of a knight of chivalry, that he had taken upon himself in her behalf.

Little by little she was learning to feel as he intended that she should feel. Dependence on him; need of him; belief in him. And he knew that there was more than this besides. During those long night-watches, when the sense of her life as it was, contrasted with what it might have been, weighed most heavily upon her young soul, did nothing stronger than gratitude and affection speak to her out of the silence? Did it not seem, sometimes, as though the friendship that



was to have been her salvation only made her actual lot appear more unendurable than ever by comparison?

By comparison with *what*? Even in the darkness, Pauline's cheeks would burn as the answer to this question suggested itself to her imagination, and the vague outline of a dream of bliss, in which she would sail eternally over summer seas, alone with her friend, intellect, heart, and entire being all replete with one entire and satisfying reciprocal love, would shape itself in her mind. At these times she would tell herself that she had tried to be a good wife to George, and that it was his own fault if she had failed. The sacrifice must not be *all* on one side, after all. And it was not her fault either if her scheme of remaining loyal to him, and seeking compensation in a pure and elevating attachment to another, threatened to turn out a failure. She had not calculated upon feeling as she did. There seemed to be so much of agitation in her present existence; and yet she felt such an awful reluctance to bring it to an end, and to return with George to so-called duty and stagnation at Rubria. She could not forego the pleasure of seeing her friend daily, yet the conditions under which they met often seemed to spoil the happiness of meeting. It was a tantalising happiness at best. If she really went back to Rubria with her husband, for Pauline was wont now to couple her return to her home with an "*if*," she must at least exchange an unhampered farewell with her friend first.

The popular notion that it is almost as sinful to meditate upon forbidden fruit as to taste of it is not entirely without foundation. Pauline's habitual tone of thought, or her "mental attitude" (to use an expression for ever consecrated by a great writer), had prepared her in a measure to accept a proposition Sir Francis Segrave made one day when he thought the time was ripe for it.

It took place at a cricket match. The day was very warm, and Pauline was walking with her friend up and down a secluded part of the Richmond lawn, while George, with his hat pushed back from his brows, was leaning against a fence, watching the game with a weary expression upon his tired face, and telling himself dolefully that cricket was not half the game it used to be



in *his* time. George's time, to tell the truth, did not date back for a very considerable number of years. Indeed, he was younger than the champion player of the eleven, who might be seen "bowling" in the distance at this very moment in his white flannel suit, aiming his ball with a skill which brought forth a sound of clapping that shook the air like a mighty shower of hail. But cards and drink were making him feel prematurely old. The three horizontal lines in his forehead were turning into permanent furrows, and his shoulders had acquired a curious stoop that Sir Francis noted with a rapid glance, as he walked up and down the lawn with George's wife by his side.

Pauline had been unusually silent. In the general way her tongue unloosed itself during these hours of sauntering in her friend's company, and thoughts that her books or her limited experiences had suggested to her flowed forth unbidden. But on this particular afternoon, whether because of the heat, or because of the oppressive recollection of George's home-coming the night before, or because of the consciousness that her stay in Melbourne was drawing to a close, objective interests seemed to find no place in her mind. She had long ago reached a stage of intimacy with her companion which left her free to remain silent when she chose. She had also learned to feel so sure of his unspoken sympathy, that she found a kind of solace in turning over her sorrows and perplexities in her own mind as she walked by his side.

It was he who broke the silence first.

"What cud of sweet and bitter thought are you chewing all this time, I wonder?" he said.

"More bitter than sweet," answered Pauline in a low voice.

"If you would *only* let me help you!" he said passionately; and then the barriers gave way and the torrent flowed forth.

They had reached a corner in which, under pretext of getting a "breath of air," they were at a safe distance from the cricket-loving crowd. Pauline sate upon a bench, with her eyes fixed upon the parched turf at her feet, while her ears drank in one of those impassioned appeals that constitute what the French call *une déclaration*. She offered no protest. In her



heart of hearts she was consenting all the time. Was it love? Was it wantonness? Whatever it might have been, she knew that she was *tired out* of her life with George, and that to dwell, even in imagination, upon the picture her friend painted in such vivid colours, was like inhaling a veritable elixir.

"We can't speak here," he said suddenly, with ill-suppressed impatience. People were beginning to wander in the same direction in search of shade. An "engaged" couple with heads bent towards each other passed slowly by. "Will you grant me one sweet favour? Give me one *little* proof of your affection for me? Darling, I would give my very life for you; you know *that*, don't you? All I will ask of you is to let me meet you this evening, and take you on board the yacht for an hour? Your husband is going to the cricketers' dinner. I have so much to say to you. We can talk without fear of interruption. If you would rather only row about in the moonlight, we need not go on board the yacht at all. But I *must* have a talk to you. What I have to say may alter the whole tenour of our lives. Pauline, my love, you *trust* me, don't you?"

"It is myself I don't trust," said Pauline in a whisper, shivering visibly despite the heat of the December sun.

"Then trust to me for *both*," he urged. "I will be at the corner of Market Street at eight to-night. I will wait until half-past, and then I will go to the hotel and find out whether you are alone—you will come?"

"Yes, I will come!" said Pauline simply. Then she rose from her seat and walked to where her husband was standing. He looked at her with dull eyes as she approached.

"I was just going to look you up," he said. "We'll go back, I think. The game's not worth looking at; and I've got a dashed headache besides."



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### HOW THE LAST STROKE OF ALL CAME TO MISS.

"The best laid schemes o' mice and men  
Gang aft agley."—BURNS.

OF all the human traits that cynics gloat over, there is none more remarkable than the one which leads us to be insincere with our secret selves, and makes us even essay to *pretend* to our own consciences that our motives and intentions are other than we really know them to be. Pauline was driven to resort to this form of special pleading as, sitting alone in the familiar room at Scott's, she tremblingly reflected upon the promise she had given to her friend.

George had gone to a dinner in honour of the cricketers, and there was not the least chance of his returning before three or four o'clock in the morning. He had said as he went out that it was about time to think of making a start for home, and that Pauline might drop a line to "old Mother McClosky" to expect them the following Saturday. The announcement had brought his wife face to face with a question that had been lying dormant in her mind for a long time past. "*Should she return with him or not?*" The solemn, sandy-haired waiter, who was accustomed to bring in Mrs. Drafton's five o'clock tea upon a highly polished nickel platter, cast a demurely curious glance at the motionless figure seated on the sofa as he entered the room. The phrase "wrapped in thought" might almost have been literally applied to it; for in the concentration of her reverie Pauline seemed to see nothing that passed with her bodily eyes.

The prospect of an immediate return to Rubria had brought the familiar once more from its hiding-place, and its suggestions were of a terrible description. "It will be worse than ever now," it said; "your husband has got into the habit of drinking, which he never had before, and you will be quite at his mercy. You will



be shut up alone with him in that isolated little home-  
stead, which will be like an oven at this season, swarming  
with flies and mosquitoes. Without interests, without re-  
sources of any kind, with no hope nor prospect of escape,  
your life will be so intolerable that you will end by hating  
him, and then existence will indeed be a hell. Better take  
things in time. Run away home to Sydney, as you thought  
of doing the day after the Cup; or tell your friend, Francis  
Segrave, who worships the very ground you tread on, how  
you feel. Tell him all about it this evening. He is much  
cleverer than you. He is honoured and respected wherever  
he goes. Let *him* take the responsibility of your actions."

"No—no—no!" Pauline said to herself vehemently,  
when the familiar had reached this point. Then came  
the recollection of the promise she had allowed herself  
to make an hour ago, and now it was that it became  
necessary to temporise with her conscience.

"I have only promised to go with him to prove my  
full trust in him, and my belief in the purity of his  
affection," she argued within herself; "he deserves some  
such proof of it, after all he has done and suffered for  
me during the past fortnight. It would be mean and  
cowardly to refuse it. And has he not promised that he  
would always be guided by my *least* wish in everything?  
Whatever becomes of me, I shall never regret having given  
him this last proof of my entire trust in him."

But even while Pauline was reasoning in this fashion,  
Truth was proclaiming another version of the case, and  
obstinately refusing to be argued down.

"Whatever you *intend*, or make yourself believe that  
you intend," said Truth, "you know quite well that you  
are going to put yourself into a position in which you  
may not be able to carry out your intentions, if they are  
all you say. Don't go at all. The old warning about  
not playing with fire is a very wise one, if you don't want to  
be burned! Of course, if you are prepared to burn, you  
may kindle as great a conflagration as you please; but  
don't persuade yourself that you are going to pour water  
upon the flames. You are going to throw oil upon them.  
You may go with the resolution of pouring water, but the  
very fact of your going at all renders that almost impossible."

Pauline caught at this "almost." There was still a loop-  
hole of escape. "He loves me *unselfishly*," she said,  
"and that means that I am *entirely* safe with him."



At this instant the solemn, sandy-haired waiter knocked at the door, and in reply to a faint "Come in," entered the room with a letter, which he presented to Mrs. Drafton upon the inevitable nickel platter, with the air of an officer of state presenting a petition to a monarch. Pauline dared not open it under the eyes of this officious personage. Her face grew white as the letter itself as she took it into her hands, and she could hardly command her voice to tell the man, who was fidgeting with the kettle hissing upon the spirit-lamp, that she would ring when she wanted him again. As soon as she was alone, she opened the envelope with eager, trembling fingers, her breath coming and going rapidly, her bosom heaving. The handwriting was bold and clear, and her eyes ran over the contents as easily as though she had been reading a printed document.

"*My* darling," the letter began, and the "*my*" was dashed underneath with a vigorous stroke, as though the writer had dared whomsoever in the world to dispute his right of possession, "the time has come for making a great resolve. By right of our love for each other, which is a stronger, holier tie, believe me, than all the artificial bonds invented by men (dating from the days when the house, the wife, the ox, and the ass, were regarded as so many chattels), your place in the world should be henceforth by my side. I *want* you, Pauline. Day and night I hunger for your presence. I want you all to myself, darling, to love and worship and honour you, with my body and soul, to the end of our days. The claim I have upon you is that, in your heart, you belong to me already. I know that there are many things to be considered besides the gratification of the one supreme want of our lives. In many cases there are obstacles which render the attainment of our heart's desire impossible. But is this so in *our* case? I have considered our position with the profoundest care. I have thought of all that is to be said for and against my project; I have weighed risks, suffering, disadvantages, as though I were entirely disinterested, and the more deeply I have pondered, the stronger my conclusion has become. There is only one possible solution. Pauline, my own, you must come away with me, and when we have taken this one irrevocable step, the rest will all arrange itself in the way I shall now explain to you.

"I will leave our own immediate future out of the



question. I will so hedge you round, my loved one, with tenderness and adoration, that you will have no time to think of anything but the present. We will wander about the world in the yacht, stopping wherever there is something wonderful or beautiful to be seen. And you have no idea yet how much that is wonderful and curious there is to see. I will teach you navigation, and you shall take me where you will. But my delight will be to surround my darling with all the loveliest and rarest things I can discover. The days will not be long enough for all we shall have to do in them. Then, of course, you will have your own boudoir and sanctum, where even *I* may not enter without permission. You shall be queen absolute there and everywhere else. For ourselves I have no fear. I honestly believe I could make your life happy if you would trust yourself to me.

“But for the effect of our step upon others besides ourselves. I will first consider your husband. Do you know, darling, that, for your sake, I have watched him closely for a long time past? and that this is my honest opinion. Even if I were not there at all, even if you had no affection for another in your heart, I should still advise you *to leave him*. Your marriage was a hideous mistake; but the worst consequences of it may yet be averted. He is young and you are young. You have no responsibilities. No one will be hurt by your living asunder. I will not deny that your leaving him will cause him pain; he will suffer severely, for, in his own way—a very inferior and animal way too—he loves you. But his nature (I have studied it closely) is not capable of suffering either very deeply or for very long at a time. The worst of his suffering will be as nothing compared with what you have been through already, and what he and you must both endure if you force yourself to prolong the unnatural tie. It is fairer and more loyal to him as well as to yourself to tell him that the marriage he forced you into was a mistake, and that you desire to be freed from it. Your freedom might be hard to obtain under ordinary circumstances, but your coming away with me would render it very easy. There would be rage and thirst for vengeance on your husband's part at first. He would not consider that he had chiefly his own greed and unscrupulousness to blame. But I would leave an adviser by his



side (you know he is very easily swayed), who would soon make him hear reason. As you would have ceased to be his wife, he would have no other resource than to ask to be divorced from you, and the divorce would be granted without the least difficulty. Of that I have made myself certain; you need know and hear nothing about it. I will take the responsibility of all that part of the business; but some day, at some English port where we are staying, I will say, 'My darling, will you go through the marriage form with me here, that I may be able to present you in England as my wife?' Then you will know that all has ended as it should. As for the effect upon your own belongings, for whom you would sacrifice everything in life, I have thought of that too. The only people to consider are your grandmother and your funny little uncle. How do you suppose your coming away with me will affect *them*? I think I know your grandmother well enough, from all you have told me about her, to be certain that she will bless the day when you leave George Drafton. She is without prejudices, either religious or social. She wants you to be happy, and I shall know how to convince her of the honesty of my intentions. I am willing to run all risks, and to sacrifice everything to the object of making you my wife. You have no sisters whose prospects you might damage by such a step. You will not cause one single tear to flow. We will get your grandmother and Chubby to come and stay with us when we are married, and the little fellow may suppose you were a widow when you became my wife, if you choose. I will write to Madame Delaunay to justify the step we are taking. Have no fear, my own darling; you *do* care for me a little, don't you? Oh, Pauline, I love you as I never thought to love in my life. But I will respect your least wish. I will not hurry you unduly, my love. When you come this evening to see what I hope you will look upon as your future home, we will talk quite quietly over my plan. I will wait for you as long as you please. If you can think of any better one, you shall tell it to me. I will take account of every lingering scruple you may feel. If you want to know me better first, I will take patience. I will submit to any test you like to put me to. But *do* listen to me, darling. Don't turn a deaf ear to my appeal. Be reasonable enough and honest enough to look the situation boldly in the face, and don't let yourself be



frightened by old bugbears of forms and words. When you come to know about all the great and enlightened souls that have broken through conventional trammels, you will find that even from a timid woman's point of view there are hundreds of good precedents for the step I am urging you to take. But I will not weary you with my reasons. Remember—eight o'clock this evening. The corner of Market Street and Collins Street. Cover yourself with a long cloak and veil. I will have a waggonette ready to drive us to Sandridge. The yacht has been anchored not far from the pier. We will spend an hour on board, and I will bring you back before twelve. Ever since our happy time in the Royal Park, and those few instants on board, I have never had you to myself for an instant. And I long so passionately to tell you all I feel—to look unhampered into your sweet eyes—to imagine for a few brief instants that the dream of my life has been realised. Whatever you may resolve in the future, you must grant me that one short hour of bliss. Have I not kept our compact? Have I not forced myself, until now, to withhold all expression of my over-mastering love for you? There is not an instant in which you are ever out of my thoughts. Sometimes I have a fancy that you are actually near me, and I stretch out my arms to grasp a shadow. . . . What right have I, you may ask, to tell you all this? Hitherto you have been to me as a marble Galatea upon her pedestal. Yet I dare to fancy that for me the marble will wake to life some day. . . . But I cannot let my imagination run upon these things. My heart throbs as though it would burst. Pauline—Pauline, I love you *too* well”——

The letter ended abruptly. There was no date and no signature. It seemed indeed to be still warm from the hands of the writer. Pauline laid it down, and, leaning back upon the sofa in the unconscious attitude of Alma Tadema's Greek girl in his picture of "Quiet Pets," fixed her eyes upon the ground and abandoned herself to her thoughts.

What a world of misfits and cross-purposes it was, to be sure! Had she only been free, how her heart would have leaped at the prospect of entering upon such an existence as the one her lover had pictured! What a paradise it seemed as she thought of it! Her ideal, as long as she could remember, had been to have for a husband somebody who would "teach her things." Not



an old pedant, but the incarnation of the "strong man," as shadowed forth by Tennyson and Carlyle—a being upon whom she could expend all the latent fund of hero-worship and enthusiasm she was conscious of possessing; and if in addition to acknowledging this prince of husbands, fate had decreed that she should travel about the world by his side—the very words "to travel" having always had a kind of magic significance for her—why, her imagination could have gone no farther. The very highest and airiest of her castles in Spain would have taken solid substance and become her permanent dwelling-place.

There was the possibility. But what was the stern reality? "How impossible to know what temptation means till it comes in our way," she reflected. "I am so sick of my life at Rubria—and oh, so tired of being married. To escape from it in the way this letter suggests seems almost *just*. Perhaps not *just*—but excusable. And I have such a desperate longing—more than a longing—a *craving* for just a little happiness before I am too old. Yet *that* feeling would not excuse me. The only possible excuse I could have would be the one of being helplessly in love. And I don't know; I *can't* know whether I am rightly in love or not. Perhaps I would have been if I were not married already. But how can my belonging to George, whom I don't love properly, in any way affect the question of my sentiment for another? And yet I feel that it affects it. Would running away be a *crime*, I wonder? I know a great many people who would say it was a crime. Yet Francis wants me to run away—and for my *own* sake as much as for his. Oh, if I could only know what to do! To-night I will tell him everything. *He* will understand. He will wait for any length of time, he says. It is a very happy thing, in any case—rightly or wrongly, no matter—to be loved in that way. But it is cheating myself to say that I will ask Francis to advise me *against* his own cause. Besides, when I am with him, have I even a will of my own? I don't seem to need a will; and that is part of the happiness."

Arrived at this point in her confused and contradictory reflections, Pauline took up the letter and read it once again. A sound in the passage outside made her start violently. She hurried into the adjoining room, and tearing the epistle into a thousand tiny scraps, threw them behind the coals in the dusty grate. This operation



achieved, she began to pace up and down the room in restless agitation. George's clothes, which he had hastily thrown aside for an evening suit, were scattered about the floor. She picked them up mechanically, and proceeded to hang them upon the peg behind the door, holding them at arm's length on account of the odour of stale smoke and strong spirits that they exhaled. A curious look gathered in her brown eyes as she put them away. Her pale lips were set as with a new resolve. George's smoke-impregnated coat had evoked a vision of his return the night before (or rather the morning before), when he had stumbled into the room with a candle in his hand, knocking up against the furniture and uttering meaningless blasphemies as he did so. She remembered that she had sat up in bed, and looked at his white face with eyes dilated with terror. He had turned upon her, and asked her, in a brutal voice, "What the devil she stopped awake for—on purpose to annoy him?" And with a sick despair at her heart she had turned away and pretended to sleep. Why should she endure a life like this? Come what might, she would escape from it. Better to "throw her bonnet over the windmills," as grand'mère called it, now—at once! Then there could be no return. Oh, the heavenly peace! The intoxicating bliss of the life that her lover offered her! The interest—the charm—the harmony of it! It was not in human nature to resist it. Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay. Better a few months of joy than a dragging lifetime of dreary, unsatisfying, tormenting existence. And then there was always the ring, if the worst came to the worst. She had her solution now. She would go on board the yacht with Francis to-night. She would tell him *everything*. She would promise everything. She would make only *one* condition. He must divulge the secret of the ring, and he must give it to her to wear—to wear always—on her own finger. And George might do as he liked, and drink, and gamble, and—and—it was a hard, set look that came into the bride's face now—at least she would never, never think of him again.

The evening was wearing on. The solemn, sandy-haired waiter was laying dinner for one, and the asthmatic clock was whirring in the strenuous and painful effort to produce the first stroke of seven. In another hour Pauline would steal out of the hotel like a thief



in the night, to meet her lover at the appointed trysting place. But she would wear a long dark cloak, not flaunting scarlet and ostrich-feathers like the girls she had seen the other night, who, Heaven help her, for all she knew had taken the first step in their downward career by some such act as the one she was bent upon this evening. With her cheeks burning—all their pallor gone now—she arranged her black sailor hat, with a long gauze veil (used as a defence against Rubria flies), in readiness for her nocturnal expedition. Then by way of making a feint of eating her dinner, lest the waiter (who *must* know or suspect something, she thought) should have his suspicions confirmed, she hurried into the sitting-room and seated herself before the solitary meal.

A telegram was lying upon the table. George often received telegrams now; she did not feel at all curious as to the contents of this one. But as she put it aside, the address of Mrs. Drafton in very plain characters struck her sight. She grasped the missive nervously and tore it open. Who in the world could telegraph to *her*? Surely Francis, who was so prudent, would not mention their appointment in a despatch that might only arrive after she had left the hotel. The thought had scarcely time to occur to her before her eyes had travelled over the words. And now the paper fell from her hands and she uttered a low, involuntary moan. The telegram was dated from Beau-Séjour—and was signed Delaunay. Its contents were as follows: "Chubby in danger. If you would see him alive, lose not time. He asks you unceasingly. Mail steamer leaves Melbourne to-night." To-night? Pauline snatched at the *Argus*, lying on a side-table, and ran her startled, terrified eyes over the first page. The steamer was advertised to leave Sandridge at 8.15. There would just be time, by making frantic haste, to bundle a change of clothes into a small portmanteau, to rush to the train in a waggonette, and to get on board the steamer in time to leave with it. She had money, thank God. George always left her enough of *that*. All thought of the meeting that had filled her mind a few minutes ago was banished on the spot. There was no room for it. There was no room for anything but the vision of Chubby—sick unto death, and wanting *her*. Oh, would she be in time? Would God only let her be in time? It was



cruel of them not to tell her before. They had spoken of his being *indisposed*. Indisposed, indeed! He was going to leave her for ever. And she (with a sob) might have been too late to go to him. Another quarter of an hour and she *would* have been too late.

It was while she was engaged in rushing to her wardrobe, and breathlessly ramming her clothes into the portmanteau, that these distracting reflections flew through her brain. In less than ten minutes' time she had rung the sitting-room bell and ordered a cab.

"You will give the telegram to Mr. Drafton when he comes in," she said, gulping down the while a choking lump that seemed to rise in her throat with the effort to speak. She had added to the telegram the words, "I have gone to Sydney; good-bye." There was no time to write to Sir Francis. She would send him a line from the steamer if possible. She gave the waggonette driver double fare, and reached the Hobson's Bay platform full five minutes early. An agonising space of time, during which parties of passengers for the mail steamer, with friends to see them off, crowded into the train, had still to be passed. It was the first time she had travelled alone. But her mind was too full of strained and painful apprehension for her to find room in it for reflecting upon her solitude. Upon arriving at Sandridge she followed the stream of people to the steamer, carrying her portmanteau in her own hands.

"You're not down for a berth, miss," said the stewardess, eyeing the striking figure, with the piteous red lips and pale cheeks, with some suspicion; "and I don't know how I'm going to make room for you, neither."

"Oh, put me anywhere! I can lie on the floor. I don't want anything," cried Pauline, battling with the lump again. Then, unconsciously increasing the stewardess's suspicions by presenting her with a sovereign, she added excitedly, "I must go—there's somebody ill," and broke down completely.

"There, there, miss," said the stewardess, slipping the sovereign into her pocket, "don't take on. You'll see he'll be better when you get there" (the "he" was a venture of her own); "and if you ain't got a ticket, my dear, why, just you give me the money—four pound—that's right, and thank you; and I'll get it for you all right, and we'll make you up as comfortable a bed on the floor as a body could wish for."



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY.

"All is change, woe or weal,  
Joy is sorrow's brother,  
Grief and gladness steal  
Symbols of each other."

—TENNYSON.

WOULD Pauline ever forget that journey? As long as memory endured she must recall with a shudder the slow labouring of the screw through the rough waves of the Rip; the dragging progress of the long wakeful night; the rolling and straining through the weary endless morrow; the advent of the second dreary night, during which the white fingers and diamond rings of a sick lady passenger impressed themselves upon her wakeful vision; the heavy hours of the second day, and the awful tension of mind and nerves as the afternoon dragged slowly on; and bets as to the precise hour of the night when they would enter Sydney harbour were made by the passengers in the saloon. To avoid having to speak, she feigned to feel ill, and lay upon her bed on the floor of the ladies' cabin with her face turned to the wall, like the Israelitish king in his despair. She could not have said just what her thoughts were all this time. The last few months seemed to be blotted out of existence, and only the Beau-Séjour life to be real. She was tormented by the impossibility of bringing Chubby's face *exactly* before her. She could recall the round cheeks, and the fair sunburnt skin, but the child's *look* would not return in its entirety. She spent a great deal of time in the vain effort to conjure it up, while her heart seemed to contract with the awful suggestion that perhaps it never would come back to her at all. But she would not contemplate the notion of Chubby's dying. The very fact of imagining it would seem to imply that there was a possibility of resigning herself to it in the end. And she



never would resign herself to it. She was quite willing to die herself, but Chubby must not die. Yet there were moments when a sick, unreasoning despair overcame her. Then would come a phase of hope, as unreasoning as the despondency to which it was sure to yield in the end. Was ever such a purgatorial day as that never-ending, sickening, grinding day on the mail steamer. There were passengers from home, who had gained their sea-legs in the Bay of Biscay, whom she heard laughing as they promenaded the deck, or gossiped in the saloon in the confidential tones that a long board-ship acquaintanceship had engendered. The piano, too, was constantly going, and clink of afternoon teacups from private cabins argued the existence of many a snug coterie on board.

Towards the evening of the first day, when the well passengers were at dinner, and her sick companions in the ladies' cabin were feebly swallowing the so-called chicken broth brought them by the stewardess, Pauline rose from her mattress, huddled a skirt and jacket over her night-dress, covered her dishevelled locks with the historic sailor hat and veil, and staggered up the staircase to the main-deck.

The warm December wind blew strongly in her face; the sea was high, and the salt spray from the mountainous waves scattered itself over her as she stood. It was a wonderful relief to escape from the stifling atmosphere below, even at the cost of feeling so giddy and so helpless. She steadied herself by leaning against the bulwarks, and looked across the ocean at the sunset sky, with its piled-up masses of purple and gold, dreamily conscious of the grandeur of the scene, yet quite incapable of taking any pleasure in it. For the first time since her hurried coming away, the thought of Chubby gave way before the memory of her friend. For full three minutes his image mingled itself with the impression of the golden light that streamed toward her from the western sky. And though she was quite unaware of it at the time, the exaltation of her mind (through which so many emotions of hope and fear, and love and remorse, had been travelling in so short a space of time) found relief by the half-unconscious rendering of them in verse. It seemed to her afterwards as though the lines had come



to her of themselves, without endeavour or effort on her own part. She neither wrote them down nor thought of them again, yet never afterwards to her dying day would the memory of them leave her.

They rang unpronounced in her own ears thus:—

“The bars of gold still linger  
Out in the radiant west;  
Borne down by a blood-red finger,  
The Sun sinks to his rest.

Gilt and rose ripples, meeting,  
Thrill through the western sky,  
As the clouds to His evening greeting  
In letters of flame reply.

O'er the waste of waters desolate,  
O'er the waste of waters cold,  
He throws a robe of violet  
Shot through with ruddy gold.

In thine eyes so dark and tender,  
But yesternight, mine own,  
Were gleams of his fleeting splendour,  
And now I am left alone.

Alone with my passionate longing,  
Alone with my thoughts of thee,  
Alone with the memories thronging  
Out of the purple sea.”

The curious result of the rapid stringing together of these verses was that they seemed to have absorbed into themselves the image of her friend that Pauline had carried about with her hitherto. Whether this is a proof that it was her imagination more than her heart that had been worked upon by his influence, I cannot determine. The fact remains that as soon as she had enshrined her emotions in a poem, that seemed to come to her while watching the sunset as the melody came to the tambourine-player in “*Numa Roumestan*,” *comme ça en écoutant le rossignol*, the strength of them was notably diminished. Indeed, when she thought at all of the life she had left behind her, it was the vision of George's consternation upon finding “the wife of his bosom” gone, more than any thought of the trouble which her friend of yesterday would experience, that haunted her. But there was, to tell the truth, little room for either kind of reflection. The second long, cruelly long day, was nothing but a series of phases of hope and despair on



Chubby's account. The mind is very like the body when it suffers, in respect of the recurrence of acute pain at irregular intervals to which it is exposed. Even when hope was whispering her "flattering tale" in her ear, Pauline knew that in a very short time there would come a fresh access of fear and despair, during which she would wet her pillow with hot tears of uncontrollable anguish. No wonder that she was white and washed-out as the journey drew to an end, and that her hands trembled to the point of rendering her almost incapable of putting on her clothes. Her head swam, her body seemed to ache all over. Save a tumbler of milk, brought her by the stewardess in consideration doubtless of the sovereign she had received (for fresh milk was harder to obtain than the costliest old wine on board the mail steamer), no food had passed her lips. And never did time seem so long or suspense so awful as during the passage of the vessel up Sydney harbour. Full two hours before the final arrival at the wharf did our heroine strain her eyes in the dark for the lights of her native city. She sate by herself upon the deck, changing her place for mere restlessness and "fidgetiness" every five minutes, and rehearsing the meeting with grand'mère alternately from a joyful and a most wretched point of view, until her brain as well as her body was wearied out. She had brought up her portmanteau from below in order to be ready to leave the instant they arrived, and now shifted it about with her mechanically, in the vain idea of posting herself and it most closely to the gangway which would by-and-by connect the steamer with the wharf. Vain delusion! When the bustle of the actual arrival really took place, she found herself on the wrong side of the deck, and before she could push her frantic way through the crowd that seemed suddenly to have hemmed her in on all sides, her elbow was seized from behind, and a well-known voice cried shrilly in her ear. "Dieu soit loué! vous voila a la fin, made-moiselle—*madame*, c'est à dire, mais on n'y pense pas—ah! c'est la pauvre dame qui sera heureuse de vous voir!"

"Oh Fifine, c'est vous! And *Chubby*?" gasped Pauline, the last question sounding almost like a wail as it burst from her pent-up soul.

"Il est très, très malade; mais il y a de l'espoir," said the maid. In the meantime she had taken Pauline's



portmanteau in one hand, and holding the arm of the latter firmly by the other, was resolutely pushing a way through the crowd. "J'ai une voiture qui attend," she explained.

A moment later Pauline was leaning back in a hansom, with her eyes closed, and Fifine was holding a small bottle of *sel anglais* to her nostrils, and uttering a thousand ejaculations to "le bon Dieu" and "Jesus Maria" in her behalf. Giddiness and emotion, above all the unaccustomed fast, had made the poor child faint. She did not return to herself until the cab rolled through the avenue gates, and the old, sweet, well-remembered perfume of the orange and lemon-trees was wafted to where she sate. Somehow, under its familiar moonlight aspect, the place did not seem the same. Her recollection of it had been of wider space and taller trees. Even the verandah seemed to have shrunk as she ran across it through the wide-open front door. But there was no time to wonder at this transient impression, for there, under the gas chandelier in the brightly illumined hall, grand'mère was holding out her arms to her child.

Pauline flew into them. Oh, why had she ever left them? She had not cried all her tears away even yet. Or was it grand'mère's cheeks that were wet, as she pressed her lips upon them again and again in a passionate embrace? The first greetings were not very coherent on either side. Pauline would have rushed to Chubby's bedside at once, but was held back in order that she might prepare herself to master her emotion upon seeing him. It was one o'clock in the morning. Madame Delaunay took her granddaughter's hand within her own, and walked softly with her up the staircase into the sick-room, where a dim night-light was burning, and a hospital nurse was sitting by the bedside. As she entered the door, Pauline could hear the child muttering in the delirium of fever. She could distinguish her own name and the gardener's, mingled with disconnected phrases about sharks upon the verandah and the cow in the bathing-house.

"Chubby darling!" she whispered, kneeling by his side and taking one of the fevered hands picking at the quilt into her own, while she softly kissed his forehead, "Pauline has come back to her darling. Aren't you glad to see her?"



There was a faint flash of recognition in the brilliant blue eyes—"Pauline—I want Pauline," said the child, and the same refrain continued long after the fleeting look of intelligence had vanished. Pauline turned a face of despair toward the nurse, who answered it by giving her an account in a softly modulated voice, attuned by long practice to the sick-room pitch, of the beginning and progress of the malady. It was malignant scarlet fever (an illness of which Pauline had had a mild form in her childhood), and the young gentleman had a very bad attack of it without doubt. But the doctor did not despair of pulling him through. The nurse considered *herself* that the fever was approaching its crisis, after which it would be easier to give an opinion. Pauline, who had never known or recked of sickness—excepting in the vaguely remembered instance when she had had the scarlatina—hung upon the woman's words as though an angel or a prophet had uttered them. Her own utter ignorance in this respect—she had never beheld a corpse or watched by a sick-bed in her life—made it extremely difficult for her to conceive the possibility of Chubby's dying. He was there before her—changed, it is true, his cheeks flushed unnaturally, his eyes shining like stars; but he was *there*—and with regard to his feverish tossing and moaning, why, she had already known him to talk and start in his sleep even when he was well. She could understand when they said that he was very very ill. But that his little body should ultimately stiffen into cold rigidity, and have to be carried away in a box and hidden out of sight for ever—that was a notion beyond her present grasp. Death must be *seen* to be believed in. There is deep truth in those unpretending lines of the poet—

"A simple child  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What can it know of Death?"

For Pauline the King of Terrors was still a vague and shadowy phantom, so far removed in time and space as to have hardly a "thinkable" existence for her. Still there were many days of cruel anxiety to be gone through. The doctor came and went; the nurse divided her day and night watches with Madame



Delaunay, Pauline herself, and Fifine. The gravel paths all round the house were covered with bark; and hour succeeded hour in warm, darkened, grief-laden silence. A telegram had been received from George requesting immediate telegraphic news of his wife's arrival in Sydney and of Chubby's condition, and promising a letter by first steamer. The message had been despatched as requested, but the promised letter had not arrived. There had been no mail indeed since Pauline's departure, and she herself waited to hear before writing. She had never received a letter from her husband as yet. For all she heard of him during this period he might have passed out of her life for ever. Madame Delaunay never mentioned his name. Fifine called the young wife mademoiselle, and forgot to correct herself, and the nurse called her *miss*. Chubby was the first thought in every mind. Yet there were moments when Pauline, sitting by the little bed in the silent, darkened chamber, found her thoughts wandering unbidden towards her woman's life, with its secret burden and sinful intentions. A kind of superstition, against which no self-originated arguments could prevail, prevented her from writing to her friend. Despite all her scientific beliefs, she seemed to see a sinister connection between her own actions in life and Chubby's fate. It was for Chubby she had married George. It was Chubby who had prevented her at the eleventh hour from sealing her destiny with another. (For, arraigned before her own conscience, she was fain to confess that the midnight visit to the yacht would have been tantamount to taking the irrevocable step.) And now, when the one prayer of her being was that Chubby might be restored to her, how could she mingle with it the thought of a sentiment that she dared not even connect with it in her mind? On the other hand, strange to say, absence from George seemed to soften the outline of him that her imagination presented to her during her lonely night-watches. She thought less of the agitated life of Melbourne, and more of the calm—too calm—existence of Rubria. Had she ever tried seriously to win over poor George to interest himself in other matters besides his horses and dogs? He had intelligence in plenty. How well he had explained the land question, both from the selectors' and squatters'



point of view, that day on board the yacht! He had a very good ear for music, too. And he always said—and she was *sure* he meant it—that for *her* he would do anything. The tears that started to Pauline's eyes during those phases of self-communing were not all of bitterness. There was pity and tenderness for another as well as sorrow for herself. What share Sir Francis Segrave, and the hardness of life altogether might have had in them, I cannot, however, say.

Chubby's fever, meanwhile, reached its crisis, and was followed by a sinking that caused the doctor to look portentously grave. But kindly sleep took the little boy in hand, and though he was too weak even to move his shrunken hand over the bedclothes, there was recognition in his blue eyes when Pauline, with a mother's yearning in her face, bent over to kiss him as he woke. By degrees the awful nightmare that weighed over the household was lifted. Madame Delaunay, with her two children under her eyes, would turn her face from the bed where Chubby was lying to the low chair in which Pauline was seated by his side, with a heart too full to speak. Day by day a little way was made, until the great, never-to-be-forgotten, happy hour, when the feeble little form was placed upon Pauline's lap by the open window, while grand'mère and Fifine, both on their knees before it, drew each a stocking over the little spindles that represented Chubby's erstwhile solid calves. Pauline knew she was very happy—though a strange feeling of listlessness had come over her. She could not eat, even to celebrate the first lunch in Chubby's convalescent room, at a table laden with Beau-Séjour fruit and flowers, and her limbs felt as though they were weighted with lead. The doctor was the first to warn Madame Delaunay that her grandchild—she was still “madame's grandchild” to the man who had brought her into the world—was sickening for a fever. It was a cruel stroke in the midst of the rejoicing caused by Chubby's recovery, and unlooked for as it was cruel. Madame found that her mind, instead of being fortified by the long sorrow and suspense it had gone through, was less able than ever to bear a new ordeal. She felt as though she were already bruised inwardly, and shrank in terror from a fresh blow. But as she had once forced her lips into the semblance of a smile, when her heart was bleeding, in order that her darling might be reassured at the



moment of leave-taking, so she now battled against the despair that overcame her, and constrained herself to think only of the immediate and practical necessities of the case. Pauline was installed in her own maiden-room, a bower of comfort and cleanliness, full too of associations of a happy and innocent childhood.

There, with George's letter by her side, she lay in a strange torpor, not realising that she was ill, feeling curiously indifferent to the past and the future, only longing to sleep. She knew the letter by heart, and somehow the words of it would continue ringing, ringing in her ears. Sometimes hardly audible, at other times almost piercing her brain. There was another letter for her lying below, and yet another, in an unknown hand. Madame Delaunay dared not give her either. By-and-by, perhaps, when she had slept; for certainly the contents of this first letter of George's were enough for her brain in its present condition.

"My own sweet darling wife," it began, "I was never so taken aback in my life, as when I got back to the hotel about *ten* o'clock, and found the telegram on the table telling me you were gone. I would have started straight after you, there and then, only I had just got a message myself from the station to say there was a big fire. Like my luck! the wool-shed was burning, and they didn't see how they were to save the homestead, though every man-jack and woman on the place was working like a nigger against the flames. I was bound to come straight up home, and I'm sure it would go to your heart to see what the place looks like now. Luckily the buildings were all put up at old Carp's expense, and if we build again we'll have something better than the old shanty to live in, you bet. But I won't write to you about this, my darling. We've got the house safe, and all that's in it. I've got to stop on a bit to settle matters up, and see what my losses are; I can't say anything yet about that. What I want to tell you most of all is this—my heart is full of you, my darling wife, night and day. Don't you think I don't know I'm not worthy of you? I can't tell what the devil came over me down in Melbourne. I never acted so before, and I never will again. I lie awake at night thinking of it all, and wondering how I could be such a cursed fool. I don't want to make excuses for myself



either, but I will say I wasn't the only one to blame. That fellow Segrave isn't a good mate for a married man. Many's the time I'd have come away if he hadn't got round me. And there was more behind the gambling racket than I told you. If I'd listened to him, I'd have gone to the devil outright. He would have got me to knock round and act so that I'd have put a bullet into myself before long. Thank God that time is over and done with. Now that I'm by myself here I've got time to think, and I've found out that you're everything in life to me, darling. I was never a great fist at letter-writing, as you know, and I can't get one-hundredth part of what I want to say at the end of my pen. But the English of it is that you're never one second out of my thoughts. Every morning I feel I can't spend another day without you. I see your sweet, dear, angelic face at every turn, and my heart aches—aches for you as though it would burst. When I get you again, my love, you shall just see what a different character I've become. I haven't studied you as I ought. I mean to work for you now, so that you shall live where you like and do what you like. We'll try and go to Europe for a year or two, and get madame and the little chap to come along with us. I'll never touch a card or run a horse again, or drink a drop of liquor if you don't want me to. I don't want any greater happiness in life than to have you give me a little bit of your love.

"I was awfully glad to learn by the last telegram that Chubby is out of danger. But you take care of yourself, my pet. Don't be tiring yourself too much. I am hurrying all I can to come and join you. But I guess it will be ten days yet before I can get away."

The letter continued in a similar strain for another two pages, ending by a passionate protestation on the part of the writer to the effect that he would never "live an hour" if he were parted from his wife.

This letter had seemed clear enough to Pauline the first time she read it, but now, as she cast her languid eyes over it, the phrases had lost all their meaning. The words had become a mere disconnected jumble of strokes: still she did not feel alarmed. Everything in the room, as well as the letter, had changed. The beautiful convolvuli that wreathed the little window-frame, and her mother's portrait upon the wall (which grand'mère had refused to



let her take away to Rubria), and the dressing-table that Fifine had newly draped with blue and white chintz—all these were blurred and distorted. The only thing that was clear was the row of differently coloured balls of light, mostly green and red, that travelled slowly across the room in a long slant, mounting as they went. It was fatiguing, to be sure, to follow their course ; and the strangest part of it was that when Pauline shut her eyes the coloured balls continued to travel all the same. Only she was not equal to the effort of wondering how this phenomenon was to be accounted for. She heard grand'mère's voice, and a male voice, which she dimly recognised as that of the doctor's, in tones that seemed to sound from a long way off. Then she felt her wrist encircled by human fingers that pressed upon it gently and firmly. She looked slowly up with eyes that wandered in spite of herself.

"Don't tell George I am ill," she whispered with effort.

The balls had gone away, and now there were only rings and stars moving backwards and forwards in space. They intercepted her view of grand'mère and the doctor, who for their part seemed to grow alternately larger and smaller, and to bend and curtsy at her like figures in a pantomime. But by-and-by the rings and stars disappeared, as the balls had done before them. Grandmère and the doctor writhed themselves out of sight, and all was dark before Pauline's gaze.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate."

—POPE.

FOR just how long a time Pauline lay stretched upon her sick-bed she could not well have told. Her impression was of a tedious, confused dream, during which she was rendered very miserable by all kinds of unlooked-for hindrances. She was always trying, she fancied, to reach some place or perform some action upon which her whole salvation seemed to depend, and always finding herself prevented and frustrated. She had some remarkable visits, too, at this time, that worried her prodigiously. One was from Mr. Travers, who stood at the foot of her bed and grinned. He grinned so persistently that Pauline grew frightened; but by-and-by she perceived that he could not help himself, for his head was nothing but a Fijian skull, like those she had seen on the *Aurora*.

She was so fascinated by this spectacle that she could not turn her eyes from it, nor even cry out to grand'mère to ask Mr. Travers to go away. Another curious visitor was Victory. The colt would actually jump over her bed, backwards and forwards, taking impossible leaps each time, until she was so tired of looking at him that she did not know what to do. Sometimes too it would rain oranges upon her bed coverings; and though that was amusing at first, the oranges would fatigue her in the end almost as much as Victory had done. Altogether it was a wearisome time, and the more wearisome that the sufferer's brain was quite incapable of grasping the fact that it was a time which would have its term.

"Mental worry has had a great deal to do with the illness, eh?" the doctor explained to Madame Delaunay, when reassuring the poor lady about her grandchild's condition. He had a trick of ending every phrase with an emphatic and interrogative "Eh?" which nobody



ever thought of answering. "It is the main cause of the kind of low fever from which our patient is suffering. You must not be alarmed at the symptoms of delirium. That is a natural consequence, eh? I will answer for it we will pull her through in a few weeks' time. Curious that the boy's illness should have affected her so powerfully. She is very impressionable, very much so indeed, eh?"

Madame Delaunay had her suspicions that there was something more than Chubby's illness to account for the "mental worry" alluded to by the doctor, but her only reply was, as she looked at him steadfastly—

"You say me there is no danger, docteur. Then will I not alarm without cause Mr. Drafton, the husband of my grandchild."

The doctor gathered his brows into a frown of recollection. "Her husband, oh—ah—to be sure! 'Pon my word, I had almost forgotten that there was a husband in the case. Well, now you mention it, I think it would be your duty to let him know exactly how his wife is. There's no danger *now*. I'll stake my professional reputation upon *that*. But he would naturally be anxious; and all things considered, I think I should lose no time in writing to him, eh?"

"*En effet?* You think so?" said his questioner, with a half smile that "gave the doctor to reflect," as madame herself would have said. "*She'll* never write," he said to himself, as he rode away past the fragrant orange trees. "Talk of mothers-in-law—eh! There's a grandmother-in-law who'll never forgive the man who robbed her of her child's heart. However, *I've* done my duty, eh? The responsibility rests entirely with her."

The doctor's surmise was correct. George was kept almost in complete ignorance of his wife's condition. To account for her not writing, Madame Delaunay brought herself to the point of inditing a letter to her grandson-in-law with her own hands, in which she mentioned casually that Pauline was suffering from a slight cold, and was under positive orders to keep her bed for a day or two. She even forced herself to write a message of affectionate import from her grandchild to the young man, though the concocting of the same cost her a terrible effort. But "Monsieur Shorge" must be kept from her child's sick-bed at all costs. To have him bending over it with a husband's rights was a vision too unendurable to contem-



plate. Madame Delaunay had never seen Pauline and George as man and wife. She almost prayed heaven that that experience might be spared her. The recollection of them as an engaged couple, and of all she had gone through at the time of their *fiançailles*, was already strong enough and cruel enough without that.

As for Pauline herself, she was incapable of expressing or even framing a wish, save that the Fijian skulls, the colts, and the oranges would leave her at peace. Only after many days of fevered dreams she woke one morning to the fact that she was lying in her own white-curtained bed in her own dear room at Beau-Séjour. The radiant light was raining down through the bars of the half-closed venetian blinds, and she herself seemed to be steeped in a kind of moist, blissful, drowsy well-being.

Oh, the blessing of feeling the things about her to be real and stable! No more monstrous shapes and distorted fancies! Her mother's sweet face in its frame on the opposite wall, that she had always connected with the portrait of Ginevra—" 'Tis of a lady in her earliest youth"—looking at her with the old fixed smile. The shadows of the creepers travelling over the white curtains, and making her think of the warm air without, dancing across the sparkling waters of the bay. It is too great an effort to realise the fact that she has been so ill. What is past and what is to come do not seem to concern her. She is only conscious that it is sweet to live—sweet to lie there, in a stupor of contentment, with her eyes half-closed, and the sounds of insects humming and birds twittering blending themselves with the murmur of distant voices into a symphony that falls like music upon her awakening senses.

By-and-by grand'mère is leaning over her with worlds of wistful love and longing in her face. Pauline just opens her drowsy eyes to smile at her, and relapses again into the happy torpor which has succeeded to the dreary dreams that have tormented her for so long.

A stillness of death prevails in the house. Fifine's tongue is silenced by fear, and Chubby takes a lesson from Berger and Bergerette in the art of not making a noise.

What will not careful nursing and beef-tea à la Delaunay accomplish? There came a day very shortly afterwards when Pauline could sit at the open window of her room and inhale the mingled perfumes of the orange-trees and the sea with a rapture only known to youthful convalescence.



Chubby, who seemed to have become amazingly taller since his illness, had been giving her a long and circumstantial description of the fowl-house he was helping the gardener to paint, with especial insistence upon the portion "he had done all his own self," and was very indignant when the advent of the doctor led to the cutting short of this interesting narrative, and, worst indignity of all, to his being politely ejected from Pauline's room.

After the doctor was gone Chubby rushed back to his old post by the invalid's side and took up the thread of the fowl-house tale from the precise point at which it had been interrupted. But raising his eyes to his listener's face, the child beheld therein something that made him stop suddenly short, and exclaim with a voice of surprised indignation—

"I do just believe you're not listening one bit." Then after another curious inspection, "And you're crying—oh yes, you *are*. Oh, *please*, Pauline, what is it? Was it the doctor?"

"Yes—no, dear!" Pauline made reply, reaching out her arm towards the child. "I'm not crying for sorrow, Chubby dear! People cry sometimes because they're *too* glad, you know."

At this rejoinder Chubby's honest eyes assumed a decidedly incredulous expression. "*I* don't cry when I'm glad. I laugh. I say 'Hip—hip—hooray.'"

"Well, you may say 'Hip, hip, hooray' for me," said Pauline, laughing through her tears; "only get me my little writing-case, and the small table from over there, and the ink, and don't talk to me till I've finished, there's a good boy. I've got to write a very important letter."

Chubby's jealousy of the important letter gave way to the pleasure of being useful. He arranged the writing-case, the ink, and the blotting-paper with mathematical exactitude, and even declared his willingness to write the letter itself—"He was in round-hand now," he explained—"if Pauline would tell him what to put in it." This amiable offer being refused, he betook himself with a somewhat injured air to the fowl-house again, and Pauline, left alone with her thoughts, took up her pen after a moment of deep reflection and wrote thus:—

"These few lines are to bid you farewell for ever. You will say perhaps that my illness has weakened my brain,



but I cannot help believing" that what people call Providence has interposed itself in my behalf to save me from committing an action which could only have ended in crime and misery unspeakable. Some day not very far in the future you will understand what I mean. I cannot say more, and I am too weak to write much. This is my final and irrevocable good-bye."

Whether from agitation, or because she was so enfeebled by the effects of her illness, Pauline's fingers trembled as she wrote. After folding her note into an envelope, which she addressed to Sir Francis Segrave, Melbourne Club, Melbourne, in a very shaky superscription, she rang the little bell that grand'mère had left within her reach, and confided the missive to Fifi, with an urgent entreaty that it should be stamped and dropped *à l'instant même* into the pillar-box just outside the garden gate. She seemed only to breathe freely after the letter was gone. It was the first and last time she would have written to the man she called "her friend." *Her friend!* And into what an abyss of horror he would have led her! Supposing the telegram concerning Chubby's illness had not reached her? Supposing that by some ghastly, horrible accident she had not looked at it, or that, in her hurry to carry out her reckless intention of visiting the yacht, she had already left the hotel before it came? Supposing she had had the time to yield in deed to the temptation which beset her in thought? What would have become of her afterwards? What would she have felt when she came to discover the awful and irremediable consequences of her madness? Where would she have hidden her crushing and overwhelming shame? There was the ring, certainly! An easy solution, perhaps, where she alone was concerned. But the mysterious, wonderful, sacred life dependent on her own—the life for which George could call her to account, the life that would confer on her the holy boon of motherhood—by what right would she have flung *that* away? And what a withering blight she would have cast upon it and upon herself! All her pride and rejoicing would have been turned into tenfold bitterness and humiliation. Her first-born! The words thrilled her with a strange ecstasy. Yet how nearly she had sacrificed that pure happiness to the satisfaction of her own unholy impulses.



Yet after yielding to the first rush of remorseful feeling Pauline tried, according to her ancient wont, to judge her position reasonably and dispassionately.

"After all," she said to herself, "why should I reason like those ancient Israelites, who thought that an unconscious sin was just as awful, and deserved to be punished just as severely, as an intentional wrong. I would have worked three ruins—my husband's, my child's, and my own, where I had thought to work only one, or perhaps none at all, but I would have done so in utter ignorance. Why should I look upon myself with such horror? Why should I feel such a sudden loathing of the man who would have taken me from George? After all, much of our feeling concerning right and wrong is instinctive, and cannot be reasoned about. The only thing I see clearly is that it is quite impossible to fight for one's own individual happiness in this world. One might as well try to appropriate one of the colours of the rainbow for one's exclusive use. We are so tangled up with our belongings that we can't detach ourselves. I dare not think now of what would have happened if I had not opened grand'mère's telegram. Where I might have been, and what I would have felt when I discovered—— But there is grand'mère, and another step on the stairs—it is George, and my heart is beating as though it would break."

"My old woman!" cried George, bursting into the room. Through the brown and sunburn that the scorching plains of Rubria and the warm Pacific winds had spread over his cheeks, Pauline could detect the sudden pallor of a strong and deep emotion. She was almost as white as her husband at the moment when he clasped her to his heart. Then down upon his knees by her side, with his arms about her, George poured forth the whole of his heart, his remorse, his love, his solemn God-help-him resolve never again to gamble, or put himself into the way of temptation of any kind. Madame Delaunay, walking restlessly about, with a stern set face, and considering her grandchild rather in the light of Monsieur Shorge's victim than in that of his wife, grew almost desperate at the undue length of the interview between the re-united couple. That Pauline should have grown fond of her husband was an hypothesis madame could not admit, not only because she herself saw nothing in George to excite *une grande passion*, but



because Pauline's letters had always savoured rather of resignation than of bridal happiness and triumph.

Yet the morning was wearing on. The little tray, arranged by madame's own hands, with the bowl of *purée aux croutons* that only she could prepare to Pauline's liking, and the *œufs à la neige* covered with golden froth, was ready to be carried upstairs. The poor child must be faint for want of nourishment, and no doubt "*cet imbecile de mari*" was tiring her out with his *bavardage*.

At last madame's patience gave way. Accompanied by Fifine and the tray, she knocked at the door, with a tap that said plainly she could take no denial. George came to open it. His face was flushed, and his eyes were shining with exultant joy. Pauline's grandmother glanced anxiously at the couch by the window.

There were traces of tears upon the invalid's cheeks, but she looked strangely happy.

"Does madame know?" whispered George to his wife. Pauline shook her head. "*Do* tell her," he urged. "I know she's always had a down on me, but she can't grudge me being so happy; it's against nature."

Whether madame grudged the young husband's happiness or not, she took advantage of the great tidings to exact an immediate promise that the event should come off at Beau-Séjour.

"Of course I'd rather our child were a Victorian," said George in confidence to his wife upon a later occasion. "I'm a Victorian myself, and I don't think the New South Walers are a patch upon *us*—but," he added rather inconsequently, after a moment's reflection, "that's as much as to say I'd rather it were like *me* than you, and you know it's just the very contrary *I'd* bargain for."

"If it could only be like Chubby," said Pauline pensively.

She was getting stronger every day, and, much to her own astonishment, found her thoughts occasionally recurring with a sense of something like longing to the lonely homestead of Rubria. Here in her early home she could see where George jarred upon grand'mère, and where grand'mère was manifestly unjust to George, in opinion if not in expression. Even Chubby seemed to maintain an attitude of covert hostility towards him until the day when George took the lattice-work of the fowl-house in hand, and left the convict-gardener and Chubby himself such miles behind him, that the little boy began



to entertain a respect for his nephew-in-law which Pauline did her utmost to foster. Strange to say, when the time came for returning to Rubria, the parting from grand'mère and Chubby was not nearly such a wrench as Pauline had anticipated.

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## CONCLUSION.

Just five years after the events narrated in the preceding chapter, a lady was seated upon a chair on the Champs Elysées, amid the brilliant surroundings of a fine spring day in Paris. A little boy, of some four years of age, with a nose of the order known as snub and a pair of remarkably wide-awake blue eyes, was running backwards and forwards between the lady's chair and a circus of revolving wooden horses, that just now was flying round to the tune of "Oh, Paris, gai séjour!" with an accompaniment of booming drums and glittering spangles calculated to deafen and dazzle all beholders at one and the same time.

"I've been on to a wooden pony just like old Victory!" shouted the child, as he ran up, in tones of such breathless excitement that the passers-by looked round and smiled. The lady blushed, for the glances directed at the little boy in the first instance were invariably arrested upon herself. This was hardly to be wondered at, seeing that she was remarkably pretty, and that her dress of black and lilac silk (*complimentary* mourning, if you please, for an uncle of her husband's who had left them money at a time when it was very welcome) came straight from a fashionable Paris dressmaker's, much patronised by a rich American and Australian *clientèle*.

To recover her composure under the consciousness that more than one young and old *gommeux* was looking at her with keen approval through his binocle, the lady rose from her chair, took the little boy's hand in her own, and allowed herself to be dragged off to behold the wooden Victory. As she did so, a gentleman with a clean-shaven face and a nervous mouth, who had been watching her, unknown to herself, with great interest and curiosity for the space of full two minutes and a half, rose deliberately from his seat upon a wooden bench and followed her.



"I'm afraid you've forgotten me, Mrs. Drafton," he said, as he approached the lady, and raising his hat from his head, replaced it immediately, whereby he proved beyond doubt that he was no Frenchman. "It's some years now since I had the pleasure of meeting you."

"I—I—haven't forgotten," replied Pauline, whom our readers will naturally have recognised at once in the lady. "You are Mr. Travers—are you not?"

From rose-red she had become very pale, and her dark eyes looked unduly scared. If the very correct and well-bred young man who had just addressed her in the broad light of day, in the midst of a crowd of fashionable loungers, had come in the same questionable shape as Hamlet's father himself, she could hardly have looked more startled.

Mr. Travers appeared to take no note of her confusion.

"How is Mr. Drafton? Is this your little boy? I was pretty sure of it. I've been watching him. He's got an eye for a horse already, though it's only a wooden one. I saw him *spot* that chestnut charger—as you say in the colonies—and he wouldn't have any other, not at *any* price."

"This is my little girl too," said Pauline, with all a young mother's pride in her voice, as she turned towards an English nurse who approached at this moment with a child in her arms. "Hold out your hand, Rosie—so!"

This injunction was clearly a feint to induce the child in question to lift a pair of magnificent dark eyes towards the attentive face of the stranger.

"And Mr. Drafton?" said young Travers, after he had declared that the little girl had eyes like Esther's, in Edwin Long's celebrated picture of that name.

"My husband?" answered Pauline. "He's very well, thank you. He's coming to join us by-and-by. We were to meet opposite the corner of the Rue Marbœuf at half-past four."

There was a pause. Pauline longed to ask for news of the *Aurora*. From the time of her returning to Rubria with her husband, after the memorable stay at Beau-Séjour, she had heard no more of the friend from whose arms she had escaped as by a miracle. Sometimes, sitting in front of those legendary logs upon the Rubria hearth, with George reading the sporting columns of the *Australasian* just opposite to her, and their first-born playing on the wallaby rug at her feet, Pauline would shudder inwardly at the secret memory of the awful risk she had run—a memory that would ever be locked within



her own breast—a memory of which the existence even could only be guessed at by one other man in the world, and that man not her husband. Yet there had been other times—curiously enough, it was always at sunset, and when she was alone upon the verandah—when the vision of the “might have been” would seem to descend upon her from the golden west, and vague imaginings of an utterly unrealisable bliss, in which mutual admiration and love and sympathy were all extravagantly blended in dual lives, and fancy and intellect found keen incitement and full play against a shining background, held her captive. These dreams had been discarded as best they might, and had disappeared of their own accord when Pauline was nursing her little Rosie. But the faint recollection of them sufficed to paralyse her power of speech now that she was in presence of Sir Francis Segrave’s companion. Though the longing to know was oppressing her heart, she could only find utterance for indifferent topics. Suddenly the young man himself broke the spell.

“I’m with the skipper again—did I tell you?—it’s such a lark. He’s quite the Ancient Mariner now. You’d never know him. *His hair is white, though not with years.* At least he says *not*. ’Pon my word, I never saw a fellow go grey all of a sudden as he did. You wouldn’t credit it.”

“Are you on the yacht still?” asked Pauline, aware as she spoke of a sudden contraction in her throat that rendered her words almost inaudible.

“The yacht!” echoed her companion. Truth to tell, it was all he had been able to gather of Mrs. Drafton’s rejoinder. “The yacht is at Marseilles. I dragged the skipper up to Paris, because I wanted to see *Les Cent Vierges*, you know. We’re at Meurice’s. Where are you staying?”

“At the Louvre—but—but not for very long—I don’t know for how long exactly.”

The answer was so painfully constrained that a sudden suspicion that George Drafton might have “gone broke” on the Cup, and fled to Europe with his wife, flashed for an instant across Mr. Travers’ mind. It was discarded, however, a moment later by her adding more composedly, “We haven’t quite made up our minds whether we shall spend the spring here or in London.”

There was another pause. Mr. Travers was evidently waiting for a friendly injunction to call at the Louvre with his companion as soon as possible, but Pauline’s gaze, fixed



abstractedly upon the whirling, twirling brilliance of the revolving circus, offered no encouragement.

"We've been in South America," he volunteered; "but it wasn't very lively. The skipper's not half the company he used to be."

"No?" said Pauline, feeling that some kind of answer was expected of her.

"No; he's turned a regular misanthrope. What's worse still, he's almost a woman-hater. You wouldn't have thought that of him, would you?"

"I don't know—no, I don't think so."

Then holding out her hand by a sudden impulse, she bade the astonished Mr. Travers good-bye, murmuring an incoherent phrase in which the words, "Very sorry," and "appointment she could not miss," seemed to offer an excuse for so abrupt a dismissal of him. Before he could recover from his surprise, he saw her move away in the direction of the Rue Marbœuf with her little boy running by her side, the nurse with the Esther-eyed baby following in her wake.

"A pretty plain hint *that*, that she prefers your room to your company, my boy," said the discomfited young man to himself, staring after her retreating figure. Until to-day he had flattered himself that Mrs. Drafton's recollection of him had not been altogether a disagreeable one. For his own part, he had never forgotten the radiant apparition that had visited the *Aurora*, and his heart had beaten faster than was its wont when he had beheld it again so unexpectedly a few minutes back.

Pauline meanwhile walked hurriedly along, unheeding of the complaints of little George, who pleaded hard for "Just *one* more go round on Victory."

Arrived at the Place de la Concorde, she met her husband on his way to join her at the appointed meeting place. Prosperity sate well upon George. He had aged, but not to his disadvantage. He carried himself with more dignity than of yore, as one conscious of his responsibilities and proud of the possession of them.

"Well, old woman!"—he had seen his wife before she saw *him*, and had found time to admire her appearance in the complimentary mourning with the old, ever-fresh admiration—"you weren't going to give me the slip, I hope? Rosie can stop out a bit longer, can't she?"

Little George was George's pride—a chip of the old



block, as any one could see—but his little girl seemed to have wound herself round his very heart-strings.

“No! I’m going to take the children back, George. I want to start for England to-night.”

“To-night! oh, that be bothered! We’re going to stay a night longer yet.”

“George! I don’t often want anything unreasonable, do I? I mean it seriously this time. There’s just time to pack up and start. We’ll come to Paris again later. If you won’t come, I’ll start first with the children. Indeed, I have a good reason.”

She was urging her suit with breathless vehemence as she walked rapidly by her husband’s side. The brilliant spring sun was streaming down through the delicate branches of the elms and chestnuts as they crossed the garden of the Tuileries on their way to the hotel. The Rue de Rivoli was lined with open carriages on their way to the Bois. Every one seemed to have hurried out to greet the radiant season.

But to Pauline’s imagination a spectre, gigantic as the spectre of the Brocken, interposed itself between her vision and the brilliant landscape spread out in front of her. Was she so afraid then of her friend? Or was she yet more afraid—great heavens!—of *herself*?

*Ce que femme veut*—we all know the rest. George experienced the truth of the proverb a few hours later, as he was speeding along by the night train to Calais with wife, children, bag, and baggage.

The last I heard of Mr. and Mrs. Drafton was their quest of a furnished house in the neighbourhood of Kensington upon a two years’ lease. “It’s a jolly good size,” was George’s comment upon the mansion finally selected to the agent thereof, “but we’re expecting an old lady and a little chap from Sydney to put up with us the last year we’re here, and they’ll want room to turn round in.”

“And then your children, a growing family, you know, you have *two* already,” suggested the agent blandly.

“Yes, we’ve got two,” said George meditatively; “and as for the family, it’s the same as with everything else—you never can tell till the numbers are up.”







A detailed black and white line drawing of the Eiffel Tower, showing its intricate lattice structure and multiple levels. The tower is positioned on the left side of the image, with its base extending towards the bottom left. A beam of light emanates from the top of the tower, pointing towards the 'GOLD MEDAL' text.

GOLD MEDAL

PARIS

1889

COLGATE'S  
PERFUMES  
AND  
SOAPS.







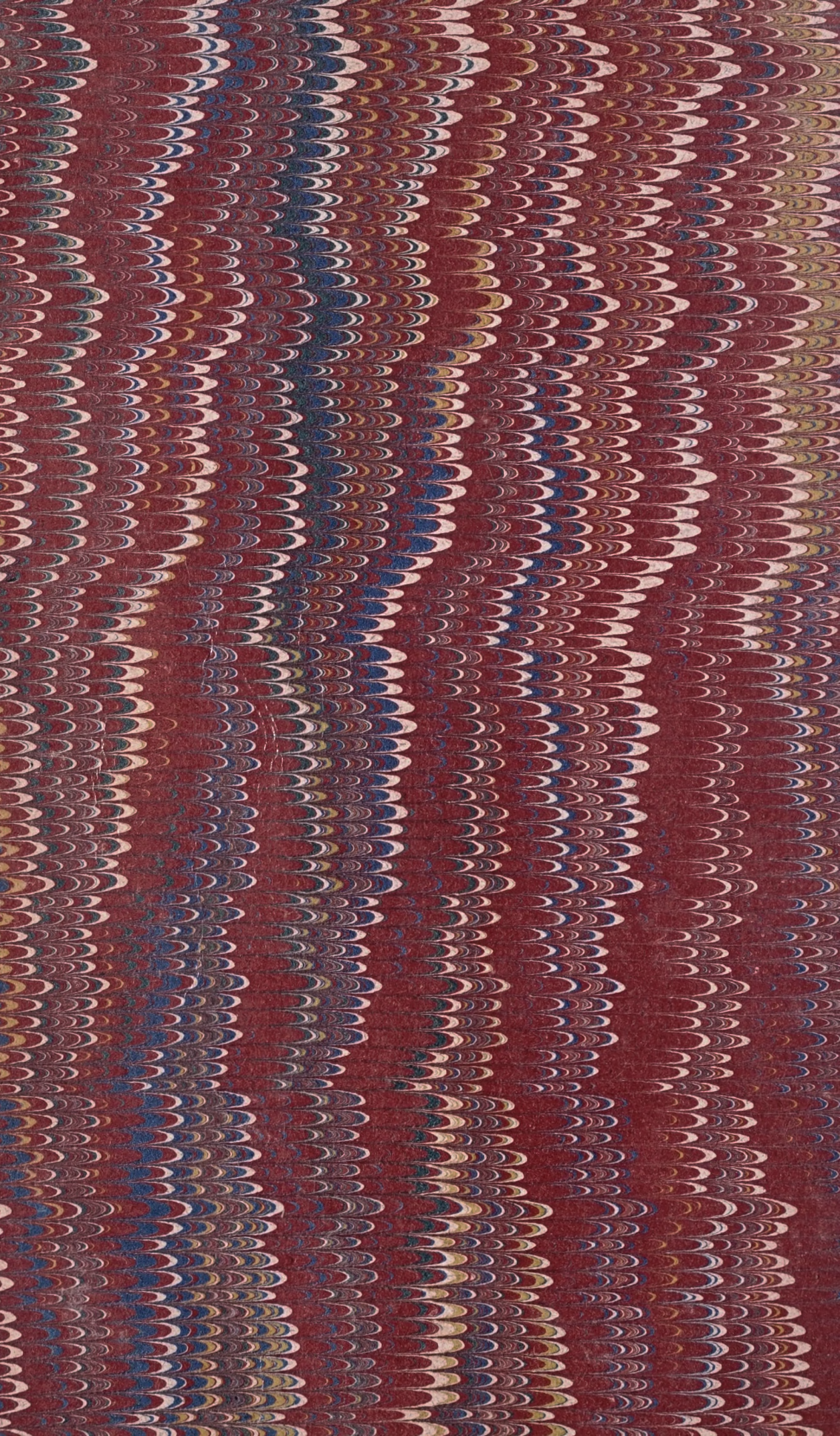




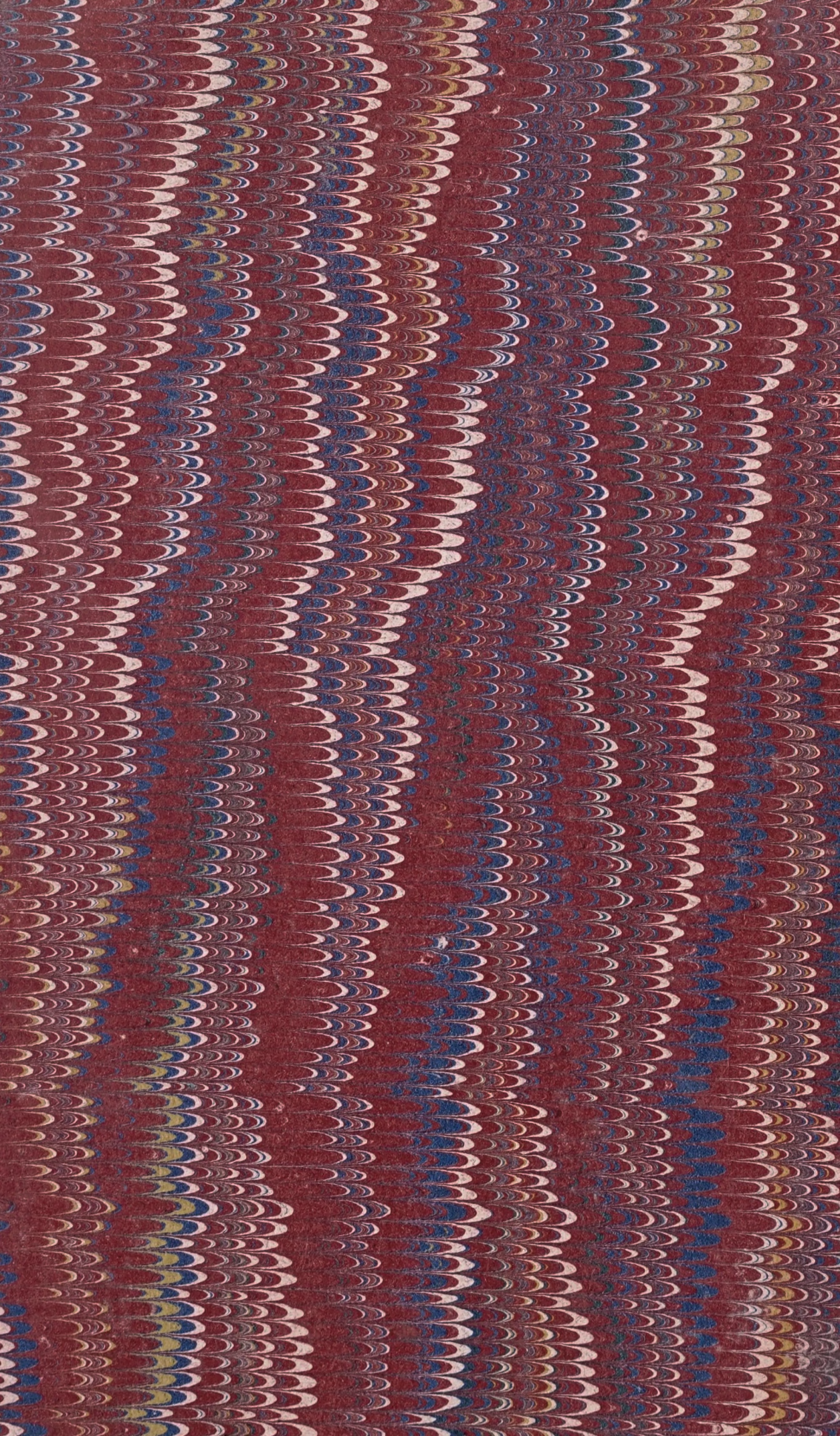














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